The Kansas City Stage: A Personal View of Our Theatre

Western Historical Manuscript Collection
Kansas City

Charles N. Kimball Lecture

Felicia Hardison Londré
October 18, 2007

INTRODUCTION
to the October 18, 2007
Charles N. Kimball Lecture

David Boutros
Associate Director, WHMC-KC

Good afternoon. My name is David Boutros and I am the Associate Director of the Western Historical Manuscript Collection-Kansas City, host of the Charles N. Kimball Lecture series.

As I thought about the little editorial that I often give here, I decided I would not do very much today—perhaps you are pleased to know that. Particularly since we have two thespians who will come onto this small stage and perform dynamically for your edification and entertainment, and I am sure to pale in comparison, I thought it best to just move quickly out of the way and let you have what you came to hear.

However, I note for you, as unfortunately I too often must, the passing of someone important to this community. Many of you know that Jay Dillingham died this past August 13, 2007. Jay was 97 and a veritable legend in this city. Serving as president of the Kansas City Stockyards from 1948 to 1975, he helped build the American Royal Livestock Show into a national institution. And to the benefit of a large group of grateful people, Jay was the creator of The Golden Ox steakhouse that adjoins the Livestock Exchange Building where he had his offices.

Always he was a promoter of the city's expansion, including locating the Kansas City International Airport north of the river. When the 1951 flood devastated the stockyards, the West Bottoms, and others parts of the Kansas City area, his influence regionally and nationally sought lakes in the Kansas River basin and Smithville Lake in Clay County to buffer against future flood waters. His presence on federal and state water resource boards assured that Kansas City's interests were voiced and met.

Jay Dillingham deserves more attention and recognition than he has received, and he has gotten a great deal.

Jay's son, John, has been an extraordinarily active and tireless support and advisor for the Western Historical Manuscript Collection-Kansas City and other historical causes. To John and his family, and to this community who has lost a valued influence and leader, I offer our condolences.

Again, I exit the stage and offer you Dodie Brown to introduce today's speaker.

Dodie Brown

Kansas City actress, founder of the New Theatre Guild

I am humbled and honored to have been asked to introduce today's speaker, a woman I have always admired and a true Kansas City treasure, Dr. Felicia Hardison Londré.

She came to us in 1978 during the glory years of Dr. Patricia McIlrath, and from that union she was dramaturg for the Missouri Repertory Theatre for twenty-two years, illuminating us with her insightful essays. However, she never lost her voice with the public. In print or in person she continues to elevate us.

In 2001, she was awarded the Outstanding Teacher of Theatre in Higher Education. I have seen her in dialogue with her students and she INFUSES them with her energy and support for their achievements. What fortunate students.

Felicia is not only a teacher. She is an actress, a poet, a playwright, a director, and a nationally and internationally recognized scholar of Shakespeare. Again, how fortunate for Kansas City.

In 1991, she co-founded the Heart of America Shakespeare Festival at Southmoreland Park. She continues to be active and I urge you to attend her nightly lectures at the south end of the park. Felicia has a way of connecting modern audiences with the language and world of Shakespeare. Her take on Hamlet: "Sex, Politics, and Religion at Elsinore." People are sitting on the edge of their seats before the play even commences.

Felicia has been the recipient of numerous honors and awards all over the world. I didn't realize there were so many *Who's Who's*—and she has been mentioned in at least seven! But there is nothing like receiving recognition for your work in your home town. At the end of the forward of her book, *Words at Play* (a collection of her essays) she tells of a baggage handler at the International airport who recognized her name on the ticket and asked if she was the lady who used to write essays for the Missouri Rep programs. Surprised, she admitted that she was, and he said "My wife and I miss you." As she glowingly walked away he added, "You are famous!" The point is, all the awards and *Who's Who's* were validated by the baggage handler at the airport!

Bob Trussell of *The Kansas City Star* also thinks she is famous, for he wrote a story this spring about her and called it "Stage Mother." Indeed, that is what she is considered by the Kansas City theatre community. She has been a nourishing supporter of every actor, writer, stage hand, director, and fledging new company for thirty years. Her sense of community, loyalty, integrity, wit, wisdom, and energetic involvement have made her a beloved authority on Kansas City theatre.

In keeping with the vision of Charlie Kimball that the history of a culture's past helps us to understand the present and gives hope for the future, I give you the authority on Kansas City theatre, my friend , the very distinguished—and FAMOUS—Dr. Felicia Hardison Londré. Enjoy!

The Kansas City Stage: A Personal View of Our Theatre

Felicia Hardison Londré, **Ph.D.**
University of Missouri Curators' Professor of Theatre

October 18, 2007

When the subject is theatre, you expect anecdotes. Stories about what went wrong backstage—or, worse, on stage, in front of an audience—are part of what fascinates the public about this compelling and collaborative art form.

Let me give you, as an example, an anecdote from our theatrical past. During the 1880s and 1890s, the great actor James O'Neill (father of the playwright Eugene O'Neill) performed the role with which he was closely identified, the Count of Monte Cristo, on eleven different engagements in Kansas City. One time during a performance at Coates Opera House, a messenger boy came to the stage door with a telegram for one of the other actors in the company. As soon as the doorman said that the actor was over on the other side of the stage, the boy darted past him, went through the wings, and made a bee-line toward the opposite wings. Unfortunately, not only was the curtain up, but it was O'Neill's big scene, when—as Edmond Dantès—he had just escaped from the island prison and was swimming through the choppy sea. The effect of turbulent waves was created by canvas flaps on parallel rods that extended all the way across the proscenium opening. Stagehands hidden in the wings on both sides would turn the rods so the blue-and-white canvas would smack, roil, and roll. While O'Neill struggled to swim in one direction, the messenger boy's head was seen calmly crossing between wave rollers in the other direction. O'Neill pulled himself up onto the rock in the middle of the waves, hastily shouted his curtain line, "The world is mine!" and even as the curtain descended, the venerable actor lit out after that hapless messenger boy.

Our theatre history is full of stories like that, but I have been asked to talk about Kansas City theatre during my own time or perhaps going as far back as the American cultural renaissance of the 1960s. Of course, mishaps still occur in the theatre. Revolving units as part of the scenery are very prone to get stuck. Sometimes in a moment of great physical exertion on stage, an actor will hear the ripping of a seam—and then will have to play the remainder of the scene desperately hoping that the costume is not torn in an embarrassing place. When Gary Neal Johnson played King Lear for Heart of America Shakespeare Festival's outdoor production, he would become so totally focused on the character's emotion, even as he waited in the wings to make an entrance, that one time he got out on stage without realizing—until he happened to look down—that he was still wearing his flip-flops! There was the assassination scene in *Julius Caesar* when one of the conspirators struggled with the folds of his tunic to pull out his dagger that was loaded with stage blood, and part of the tunic came with the dagger in a dramatic moment thenceforth remembered as "the attack of the bloody pocket-liner." There was Juliet debating whether or not to drink the potion in Heart of America Shakespeare Festival's first production of *Romeo and Juliet*—while a police helicopter hovered overhead and drowned out every word of the valiant little actress's poignant scene! And just to prove that things don't go wrong only in Shakespeare: there was the

opening night of Missouri Repertory Theatre's *Billy Bishop Goes to War*—on the same night as the beginning of the first Gulf War, so the audience stayed home in droves.

On the whole, the thoroughness of the rehearsal process and clear lines of responsibility in today's theatre leave little room for surprise in performance. The occasional glitch is something that the actors may laugh about over drinks after the show, but then it's quickly forgotten, certainly not buzzed about in all the newspapers the way such stories were in the days when every Kansas Citian was a theatergoer avid for the latest backstage gossip.

In the days when everybody went to the theatre, the public got a sense of "ownership" from hearing stories about favorite actors and other insider tidbits related to the theatre operations. That sort of popular appeal works especially when there is a highly visible and beloved public figure at the helm of a resident company with a core of artists who become familiar to the public through a variety of roles. The person within living memory who did that best was, of course, Dr. Patricia McIlrath, founder and first artistic director of Missouri Repertory Theatre.

Patricia McIlrath is central to any story about Kansas City theatre in our time—that is, roughly since the 1960s. Indeed, I think of her as the patron saint of the "second golden age" of Kansas City theatre, and I will say more about her in a few minutes. Before I get to that, let me mention that you can read about the "first golden age" of our theatre in my recent book *The Enchanted Years of the Stage: Kansas City at the Crossroads of American Theatre, 1870-1930*, published by the University of Missouri Press earlier this year. The book begins with our muddy little riverboat landing in the 1850s and shows our town limping along with minimal culture before, during, and after the Civil War, and then it focuses on the glory years of touring stars of the stage from 1870 to 1930, during the heyday of the railroads. Actually the enchantment was already losing its luster in the 1910s, when vaudeville displaced live theatre, and then movies displaced vaudeville, while the Great War, the radio, and the motorcar also took a toll. From 1900, when Kansas Citians could attend nightly performances of live theatre at any one of five 2000-seat theatres, cultural attractions steadily declined.[1] The last legitimate theatre, the Shubert, was razed in 1936. By the 1940s, Kansas City's only professional theatre was provided by touring companies that occasionally played the Music Hall. During the long dry spells between those events, community groups sometimes presented plays at Ivanhoe Temple.

It was the community theatre groups of the Kansas City metropolitan area—like those across the nation—that sustained a broad audience for live theatre from the 1920s through the 1950s, decades when "professional theatre" pretty much meant New York City. Between its first and second golden ages, Kansas City saw numerous heroic efforts by valiant amateurs. For example, Art Ellison (1899-1994) began acting with little theatre groups in 1914, when he was fifteen years old, and continued performing on an amateur basis during his decades of employment at Kansas City Power and Light. He was one of 200 local extras in Max Reinhart's *The Miracle*, a mammoth religious touring production that transformed Convention Hall into a cathedral for three weeks in November 1926. Only after he retired from KCPL did Art become a professional actor—in 1964, the very year Patricia McIlrath founded the professional theatre that would become Missouri Repertory Theatre. As an amateur, Art Ellison also acted in 57 productions at the Resident Theatre, which presented plays from 1932 in association with the Jewish Community Center. And he found opportunities with the Bell Road Barn Players, which is today Kansas City's oldest community theatre, and with the Barn Players, presenting community theatre in Johnson County since 1955. Two other long-lived organizations were the Circle Theatre, which presented plays in Union Station

1. The five big theatres in 1900 were Coates Opera House, Gilliss Opera House, the Orpheum (formerly Ninth Street) Theatre, Auditorium Theatre, and Grand Opera House. In addition, there was the smaller Butler's Standard (today's Folly). The Louis Curtiss-designed Willis Wood Theatre at 9th and Baltimore existed only from 1902 to 1917.

for five seasons beginning in 1962, and the many-branched Community Children's Theatre.[2] Truly, there were great numbers of dedicated volunteers who kept theatre alive in Kansas City after "the enchanted years" came to an end.

That was the situation in 1954 when Patricia McIlrath, having earned her Ph.D. at Stanford, and having begun an excellent career-ladder position at the University of Illinois, returned to her hometown Kansas City to see her dying father. On his deathbed, the distinguished lawyer told her that Kansas City had been good to him and the family, that he felt he had not contributed enough in return, and that he hoped his daughter Patty would be able to do something to repay their beloved city. Patricia had no idea what she might do to fulfill her father's wish, but she inquired about possible job openings at the University of Kansas City. As Fate would have it, the position of director of the University Playhouse had just been vacated, and it was offered to Patricia McIlrath, along with the chairmanship of a department that combined speech, radio, and theatre courses toward a degree in English.

Then Patricia McIlrath had to make a difficult decision. She loved the University of Illinois and had a very promising academic career in theatre studies well underway there. Illinois had a fine theatre facility and 26,000 students, whereas UKC's theatre was a war-surplus building brought in from Camp Crowder, and the student body numbered fewer than 2,000. Theatre professors all across the nation were shocked that Assistant Professor McIlrath would give up her prestigious faculty position at Illinois. Even as late as the 1980s, I met professors who recalled having thought that Patricia was making a big mistake. Why did she do it? Of course, she was honoring her father's wish, but perhaps also she sensed the potential at this university and in this city. In retrospect, we can see it only as something that mysteriously was meant to be.

Patricia often spoke to me of those exhilarating years when she was driven partly by the knowledge that—as she put it—"people <u>need</u> live theatre, even when they don't know they need it." Often I would write down her anecdotes soon after she told them to me—far too many to include here—but I want to acknowledge an important source, quite apart from my own memories, that I consulted in preparing these remarks. Shortly after Dr. Mac's death in 1999, my student Anne Einig, in the Master of Arts program in Theatre, decided to write her Master's thesis on Patricia McIlrath. Although Anne never met Dr. Mac, she did a remarkable job with her thesis, for which she painstakingly established an accurate chronology; researched the holdings of UMKC University Archives, Western Historical Manuscript Collection, and other archives; and interviewed and corresponded with dozens of people. She forged a historical record that is both scholarly and warmly sensitive. Anne Einig Johnston is now the education director for Starlight Theatre, and I thank her again for her contribution to our understanding of our own theatrical past.

Patricia McIlrath's first task in her new position at the University of Kansas City was to revitalize a department that had fallen into disarray since the departure of Dr. John Newfield two years earlier. Within her first year, 1954-55, she won approval for a newly organized Department of Speech and personally directed four plays. For ten years Patricia continued in that vein while she was also working toward her larger goal of achieving a working relationship between educational and professional theatre. We who have benefited from the fruits of her labors might find it difficult to realize how much antipathy there was between the two in those days. Academics felt that an educated person should scorn to work with those who entertained the public for a living, while professional theatre people regarded educational theatre as boring and amateurish, certainly not worthy of their attention.

2. Two Master of Arts theses in progress in Theatre will contribute to our knowledge of these companies: Thomas Canfield is researching the Circle Theatre, and Sarah Oliver is researching Kansas City Community Children's Theatre.

In 1958, Patricia McIlrath attracted a major professional actress—Judith Evelyn—to perform the title role in Sophocles's *Electra* alongside the students. The show opened in the former Quonset hut, the University Playhouse, on December 2, 1958, following a disastrous final dress rehearsal. Because of a heavy snowfall, the car in which Patricia, her mother, and Judith Evelyn were coming to rehearsal got stuck on Cherry Street. The three women together could not budge the car, so they had to trudge through the snowdrifts the rest of the way to the Playhouse. Patricia carried a cake she had baked for her cast and crew, but she slipped and fell on the cake. Arriving late to rehearsal (the director herself caked with snow and frosting), the women learned that the theatre's heating system had failed. Dress rehearsal had the cast fully dressed—in their winter coats and mufflers!

Amazingly, *Electra* opened successfully the next night and earned high praise from the *Kansas City Times* critic Landon Laird for all aspects of the production. Judith Evelyn was pleased enough that she arranged for the show to be produced at the off-Broadway Rita Allen Theatre with Patricia McIlrath directing a professional company. Kansas Citians have always seemed to crave some sort of East Coast validation and so Patricia was prevailed upon to accept the sudden opportunity. It turned out to be one of the worst experiences of her entire life. *Electra* opened off-Broadway on Friday the Thirteenth, 1959—after a short rehearsal period during which the producers insisted on all kinds of last-minute changes. Patricia was too inexperienced to stand up to the professional producers. Major theatre luminaries, including John Houseman, attended the opening, while all of Kansas City awaited glowing reports. The show's resounding failure made a life-changing impact on Patricia McIlrath. Knowing that she had disappointed so many people made it clear to her that higher education had not prepared her for a professional theatre job. Out of that disaster and humiliation in New York she forged the plan that would make Kansas City a mecca for Midwestern theatre. She became obsessed with the goal of incorporating professional theatre training into the University of Kansas City's educational theatre program.

Patricia McIlrath's spiritual strength supported her as she overcame endless obstacles. Her perseverance was remarkable. After being laid low for four months by Malta fever, she took a sabbatical year to study theatre in Europe. She prayed at all the great shrines and cathedrals—Lourdes, Fatima, St. Peter's, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem—always for the guidance to rebuild the reputation of theatre at the University of Kansas City by creating an innovative curriculum that would enable students to work with a professional theatre company and, in her own words, "to persuade rarely gifted professionals to stay on and join our work, our dream, so that no one—students, artists, or audiences—need fear our passion for excellence, and our objectives."[3]

There had been no resident professional theatre operation in Kansas City since the 1930s. Yes, there were still people who could wax nostalgic about the enchanted years of theatre remembered from childhood. For example, the beloved high school speech teacher Cecile Burton recalled having seen Maude Adams as Peter Pan and having got most of her education from the second balcony at the Shubert. But a generation or more of Kansas Citians had grown up with no theatergoing habit at all. One part of Dr. McIlrath's campaign was to convince people of all ages that they needed live professional theatre and should support the creation of a resident company. On another front, she had to put together a viable plan that she could sell to the university administration. There were few models for her to emulate (remember this was even before the Guthrie opened in Minneapolis), but she visited Yale and Harvard Universities to study their theatre programs, and she looked at state-subsidized theatres in Canada. Patricia McIlrath gave speeches, wrote articles, baked cookies, rang doorbells, applied for grants, hounded the mayor (who happened to be her former Paseo

3. Patricia McIlrath, "A Tribute to Vincent Scassellati," 2 May 1997, Patricia McIlrath papers in University of Missouri-Kansas City University Archives, cited by Anne Einig.

High School classmate Ilus Davis), and enlisted the support of *Kansas City Star* drama critic Giles Fowler. When I came to Kansas City in 1978, I heard about how Patricia used to attend concerts downtown, and at intermission she would "nickel and dime her way up the aisle," collecting checks or pledges for the theatre she envisioned—and later for the equipment and support she needed to run it.

The dream began to become reality in the summer of 1964 with two theatre productions in two weeks of rotating repertory, presented as the Summer Repertory Theatre, at the Playhouse on the campus that had just that year become part of the University of Missouri system. The following summer, 1965, Patricia McIlrath doubled the season to four plays running five weeks in rotating repertory, two of the shows directed by the distinguished guest director Rod Alexander, from Oregon Shakespeare Festival. That second season was marred by the stifling heat, because the university administration did not yet fully grasp the importance of what their feisty, hard-driving theatre professor was doing and they turned down her request for air conditioning in the Playhouse. Patricia did not give up despite a university rule against the installation of air conditioning in a temporary building. She found a contractor and she found a group to finance it, so the authorities in Columbia finally classified the University Playhouse as a *permanent* temporary building! With the installation of central air conditioning in 1967, Summer Repertory Theatre was eligible for Equity status; that is, the company now met the requirements of Actors Equity Association and could be considered fully professional. This also became the occasion for taking the name Missouri Repertory Theatre, by which the 1968 season was announced.

It had been an unrelenting uphill battle for Patricia McIlrath to get that far in four years. But she had scarcely begun. In 1968 she added a touring branch of Missouri Repertory Theatre, called Missouri Vanguard Theatre, which took two productions on a seven-week tour of Missouri towns that otherwise would never see professional theatre. In its first three years, Missouri Vanguard Theatre performed in fifty towns to a total audience of 80,000. Patricia continued to attract major artists, like director Alexis Minotis, founder and director of the Greek National Theatre. She added actors like Harriet Levitt, James Assad, Robin Humphrey, and Dick Brown to the professional company and often got them to teach courses at UMKC. She wanted Kansas City to be a place where artists could settle down with families and be a part of a thriving cultural community.

Throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s, Patricia McIlrath continued her academic duties as chair of what became a separate Department of Theatre in 1972, while she also served as artistic director of the ever-expanding Missouri Repertory Theatre. She attracted renowned Broadway and international directors—big names like John Houseman, Alan Schneider, William Woodman, Adrian Hall, John Reich, Harold Scott, Michael Langham, Boris Tumarin, Cyril Richard, Cedric Messina, Vincent Dowling, Tunc Yalman, Erik Vos, Ying Ruocheng—and most of them returned to work again at the Rep, because Patricia created such a welcoming climate for the visiting artist.

While applying for approval from the state's Coordinating Board for Higher Education to offer the Master of Fine Arts degree in Theatre (which was granted in 1981), Patricia McIlrath also worked tirelessly to get a new theatre facility built. Ground was broken for UMKC's Performing Arts Center in 1976, but before it could open, the University Playhouse was condemned. Arrangements were quickly made to move the academic offices and classes into the old Nichols School (today the Académie Lafayette) on Oak Street, while Missouri Repertory Theatre presented its 1977 and 1978 seasons in Danciger Auditorium of the Jewish Community Center, then located on Holmes. And that was the situation when I arrived as a newly-hired faculty member in the fall of 1978. Dr. McIlrath used the faculty opening for a theatre historian to create the ancillary position of dramaturg for Missouri Repertory Theatre. When I interviewed for the job, I had no idea what a dramaturg was, because so few American theatres had them at that time. This is one more instance of how Patricia McIlrath was in the vanguard of developments in American regional resident theatre.

As a pure academic, I had never had any professional theatre involvement at all, but Patricia quickly pulled me into the process. Ignoring my callowness, she invited me to dinners with guest artists and asked my opinion about plays she contemplated doing. She had me attend auditions and rehearsals, write evaluations of the tons of new play scripts that came in, and write essays for the program. She gave me the latitude to find out what I liked to do and what I did best. It took a while, but eventually I realized that I was born to write program essays. In retrospect, it's clear that my early essays were not very good. In fact, one day communications manager Charlotte Legg showed me something she had received in the mail. The page with my essay had been torn from the program and sent back with the word "BULLSHIT!" rubber-stamped in red on my writing. But Dr. Mac let me find my way with only the gentlest of suggestions. In June 1979, at the dedication of Helen F. Spencer Theatre, she whispered to me when I came through the receiving line that our artistic director-dramaturg relationship would be analogous to that of Stanislavski and Nemirovich-Danchenko. It's probably not possible to convey in words what that meant to me at the time. I had not yet proved myself, but she believed in me. The more important point is that she had that effect on everybody who ever worked with her.

One of my favorite stories about the kind of leader Patricia McIlrath was concerns Missouri Repertory Theatre's remarkable 1983 production of *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby*. This was a huge undertaking for any American regional theatre, and Missouri Repertory Theatre was one of only three American companies to do it. Patricia McIlrath had dreamed of producing the play ever since she saw the Broadway production, for which ticket prices reached the unprecedented hundred-dollar mark. One day in 1982, Patricia told me that the Rep board had met that morning and had decided that *Nicholas Nickleby* would be too great a risk and that we should not tackle it. I expressed my profound disappointment, and she responded, "So you think we should go ahead and do it?" "Oh, yes!" I replied. She directed her intense blue-eyed gaze at me and said, "Well, you are surely right." As you know, we did do *Nicholas Nickleby* and it was brilliant, artistically and financially, and in terms of recognition for the Rep, probably the high point in the theatre's history. For sixteen years, I carried the secret knowledge that I had been instrumental in Patricia's decision to go ahead with the risk of doing it. And then, in 1999, board member Mark Gilman and I were reminiscing, and he told me almost the exact same story: how he had been the one whose opinion caused Dr. Mac to put *Nicholas Nickleby* into the Rep season over the rest of the board's reservations. Ladies and gentlemen, that is leadership. Patricia McIlrath made each and every one of us feel like the one whose opinion counted in her decision-making!

I had the joy of working with Patricia McIlrath from 1978 until her retirement as chair of the Theatre Department in 1985 and as artistic director of Missouri Repertory Theatre in 1986. Very often people don't know that they have participated in a golden age until the golden age is over and they can look back on it. But we knew we were in a golden age while it was happening. We had such vitality in our sense of community, collaboration, teamwork, building something special that would do more good than we could ever see directly. Each year we did a four-play winter season and a four-play summer season, plus *A Christmas Carol*—a nine-play season! And because each four-play half-season was in rotating repertory, we had a substantial company, and Actors Equity rules allowed unlimited student participation. The company meeting at the beginning of each half-season was a huge, joyous gathering of all actors, directors, designers, crew, and staff for those four plays. The spirit of an artistic family was so energizing and uplifting. In the scheduled rotation, there would always be one weekend after all four shows were opened when we would do all four in two days; that is, different shows for a Saturday matinee and evening and Sunday matinee and evening. The changeovers of scenery were grueling for the stagehands, but it allowed theatergoers to drive in to Kansas City for a fully-packed theatre weekend, and people did come from a 300-mile radius. We did achieve Dr. Mac's dream of making Kansas City a magnet for theatre arts and a home for theatre artists.

You have to understand something about those of us who had those years with Missouri Repertory Theatre. People hear us talk about it and assume that we want to dwell in the past or recreate the past. No, we know that times change, and we want to be a part of whatever the arts will do to help people with the changes in the world. But we also know that we had something truly special, and we will always cherish that and be better because of it.

When Patricia McIlrath retired, it took two men to replace her. Jacques Burdick was hired as chair of the department and George Keathley as artistic director of Missouri Repertory Theatre. Patricia continued to attend virtually every theatre production in Kansas City and every public lecture by any of her former faculty colleagues. But she was determined not to hover or seem to be looking over George Keathley's shoulder. She certainly was not proprietary, but relinquished her role completely. George was wise enough to respect Patricia's legacy, even as his very different sensibility began to be evident. The repertoire of plays became less classical and less international, more contemporary and Anglo-American. Whereas Patricia had brought in big-name directors, George focused on star actors like David McCollum and Celeste Holm.

Missouri's chronic budgetary woes took a toll, and rotating repertory was scaled back, finally ceding entirely to a stock system. Soon the number of full-scale mainstage productions was cut back from nine to seven to five plays per season. On the other hand, there were a number of new-play initiatives, with a lot of readings of new scripts, some of which advanced to workshop production. The tour had grown from its original mission of serving small-town Missouri to a nationwide tour reaching 22 states, which brought corresponding nationwide press coverage. Planning the tour was probably the artistic director's major headache each season, and thus in the 1991-92 season, the tour was discontinued entirely.

George Keathley was an excellent director, and he usually directed two shows per five-play season. When he began his tenure, he asked me how I wanted to be involved with the Rep. I told him that I liked to write the program essays, and so I happily continued to do that.

At some point, I noticed that I had also developed a penchant for giving advice, usually about what plays Kansas Citians really needed to see. George would listen politely and ignore my suggestions in a very diplomatic way. However, I can claim one major success. Four years went by and George had not done a Shakespeare play, so I invited him out to lunch and tried to say the things I thought Patricia McIlrath would say about the importance of doing Shakespeare. George had never directed a Shakespeare play in all his long, distinguished career, but he did take up the challenge. Amazingly, for his first venture into directing Shakespeare, he chose the second-longest play in the canon: *Richard III*. It was a superb production with the magnificent Marco Barricelli in the title role. George was so galvanized by his work with the greatest playwright of all time that he took on *King Lear* the following season!

In September 1991, Missouri Repertory Theatre began rehearsals for *King Lear*, directed by George Keathley. The production concept was very exciting, with the late great Chinese actor Ying Ruocheng as Lear, while actresses of three different ethnicities were cast as the three daughters. The show had been in rehearsal only a few days when I had to go out of town for the weekend. Upon my return, I was shocked to learn that Ying Ruocheng had left the cast and that his understudy had stepped into the role. It was reported in the newspaper that illness had forced this change.

Over the next few days, I learned that the story was not so simple and that Ying Ruocheng would be giving up his semester-long appointment to teach at UMKC, because he did not want to stay in town under the circumstances. Ying Ruocheng was an internationally renowned figure, who had founded a theatre in Beijing, spent time in prison during the Cultural Revolution, spontaneously translated Bob Hope's witticisms into laughter-provoking Chinese when Hope toured to the Great Wall of China, acted in Hollywood movies like *The Last Emperor*, and served as China's Vice Minister for Culture. To have someone like that feel as if he had been wronged was outrageous!

There was no way to undo the terrible blunder, but I could scarcely contain my anger over the situation. I told George Keathley that I was angry and needed to talk with him, and he agreed to have it out with me after he got the show open. We made an appointment, setting aside about two hours one afternoon after *King Lear* had opened.

Behind the closed door of George's office, we used our two-hour session in a full-throttle argument. We vented at each other in tones ranging from surly muttering to shouting. I remember thinking that on the other side of the door it must look like one of those animated cartoons with the door bulging in and out while clouds of dust emanated from the cracks along with sounds of GRRR! POW! BAM! The "bam" sound would have been George pounding his fist on the desk to make his point.

Since I was in the chair facing George's desk, I was not close enough to pound on it, but I hissed imperiously: "How dare you treat a major talent like that?!!"

He got up, came around his desk, jabbed his finger about two inches from my face, and snarled: "I trusted you. It was your idea to bring in a Chinese actor. You are the one to blame!"

"You're a xenophobe," I screeched at him.

"I am not a xenophobe!" he yelled back.

I stood my ground: "You are so! You—you—you xenophobe!"

Insults like that flew back and forth.

Eventually the vehemence settled into accusations, explanations, counter-objections, justifications, more objections, more explanations. Gradually we wore each other down without either one of us budging an inch on our own view of what had happened, how it had been handled, how it could have been handled better, and other recriminations. We each conceded only that we would <u>never</u> see it from the other's point of view. And with that landing upon the tiniest possible common ground, it ended.

George and I worked together happily ever after. When George Keathley retired from the artistic directorship of Missouri Repertory Theatre in 2000, I told him that I cherished the memory of our big fight. He admitted that he did too.

The third head of Missouri Repertory Theatre (from 2000 to 2007) did not respect the artistic legacy to which Patricia McIlrath and George Keathley had devoted themselves, much aided by the tireless supporting efforts of Jim Costin as administrative director. The producing artistic director we hired in 1999 expressed his conviction that everything originating in Boston was superior to anything created in the Midwest. So he set about putting his own stamp on the Rep. He chose the plays using his own taste as the sole criterion. He dipped deeply into the endowment that Jim Costin had so carefully amassed. (As far back as Aristotle's *Poetics*, this principle has operated in the theatre: artistic deficiency can be camouflaged by spending a lot of money on elements of spectacle—scenery, costumes, and music.) Kansas City money was sent out of the community to buy productions created elsewhere. During the first three or four seasons of that regime, our resident artists were publicly denigrated. We saw a lot of actors brought in to play roles that could have been far better performed by our own Mark Robbins, Peggy Friesen, Merle Moores, Melinda McCrary, Robert Gibby Brand, David Fritts, Walter Coppage, John Rensenhouse, Cathy Barnett, Lynn King, Brian Paulette, Phil Fiorini, Kathleen Warfel, Scott Cordes, the late beloved Betsy Robbins, and many others. If you saw the Rep's *King Lear* last season, you may remember it as I do: not the tragedy of King Lear, but the story of Kent and Gloucester. Those two roles, played by our own Kansas City actors Gary Holcombe and Gary Neal Johnson, were the ones that had heart in their characterizations, not to mention superior diction and ability to speak the lines truthfully, believably.

There was a remarkable turnover of Rep staff and board members during the first season or two of the Boston producer. In the case of UMKC's theatre faculty, who had always worked selflessly and harmoniously in service to the "organic relationship" of professional and academic theatre that

Dr. Mac had envisioned, it really defies common sense that we were so quickly and involuntarily divorced from the Rep. Then, in 2004, for the company's 40th anniversary season, the very name of Missouri Repertory Theatre no longer graced it. The change to Kansas City Repertory Theatre made sense in some ways, but on the other hand, I have heard quite a few theatre professionals in New York and Washington D.C. express bewilderment at the way an existing national reputation was discarded in favor of starting at zero to build new name recognition for what sounded like a scaled-down entity.

I suppose it is appropriate for me to say something about my own position in all of this. When you get a new leader, you expect that there will be changes. Indeed, you look forward to the prospect of changes that will reinvigorate the artistic processes. When the Boston producer said to me soon after he was hired that my essays would no longer be needed for the program, I believed he must have something better in mind. You can imagine my disappointment when the play programs turned out to be odds and ends of unsigned materials, often with typos and bad syntax. To me, no by-line on a published piece means no integrity. When I saw the way uncredited sources were used, I hoped that the public would no longer associate me with this theatre.

Thanks to the solid foundation created by Patricia McIlrath, there are plenty of professional theatre artists now making their homes in Kansas City. And that means there are lots of theatres. Patricia herself would probably agree that it's a healthy thing for the cultural life of our community that the Rep is no longer the flagship theatre. It is one among equals that include the Unicorn, the New Theatre, the Coterie, Starlight, American Heartland Theatre, Actors Theatre KC, Quality Hill Playhouse, Paul Mesner Puppets, Metropolitan Ensemble Theatre, and Heart of America Shakespeare Festival. And there are still more theatres that have carved out their niches: the various affiliates of Just Off Broadway, Gorilla Theatre (which produces the annual summer solstice sunrise Greek theatre), Martin City Melodrama, Theatre for Young America, Barn Players, Bell Road Barn Players, Full Circle, Theatre at Vis. Some companies no longer exist, but live vividly in our memories: the Resident Theatre, New Directions Theatre, the Foolkiller, Ivory Tower Players, and, of course, Late Night Theatre with its over-the-top performances by Ron Megee, Philip blue owl Hooser, Missy Koonce, Jessalyn Kincaid, Deedee DeVille, David Wayne Reed, Gary Campbell, and others.

Clearly, I cannot cover all of those theatre companies in the time we have today, so I have to be cruelly selective. Given the presence of the remarkable Dodie Brown in our midst, I want to say something about Dinner Theatres, Incorporated. Richard Carrothers and Dennis Hennessy were students under Patricia McIlrath in the 1960s. The 60s and 70s were the heyday of dinner theatres all across the United States. And since Kansas City is so up-to-date, "the boys" (as Dr. Mac called them) started two dinner theatres here: Tiffany's Attic (1972) and Waldo Astoria (1973). They were wildly successful and even managed to keep going after the dinner theatre phenomenon ran its course everywhere else. With unerring business sense, Hennessy and Carrothers kept abreast of changing demographics and, in 1992, opened the magnificent New Theatre in Overland Park to replace the two smaller operations. The certainty of good food and a good show, often with a star performer, worked to draw young adults and families—an enviable demographic—to the New Theatre. The figures are astonishing for any theatre company—with or without dinner: 25,000 season subscriptions[4] and most shows playing to 98 per cent capacity.

Behind the scenes, in the tradition of Dr. McIlrath, Carrothers and Hennessy give something back to the community. First of all, the 250 employees are treated as stakeholders in the business. In fact, beyond their salaries and generous benefit packages, eligible staff get a hefty share of the annual ten per cent "profit margin on ten million a year in revenue."[5]

4. Robert Trussell, "Dinner and a Show," *The Kansas City Star* (7 January 2007), F12.
5. Joel Dorr, "Theatre Business 101—Where the Patron is Priority One," *DramaBiz Magazine* (May/June 2006), 19.

Both Dennis Hennessy and Richard Carrothers serve on various civic boards. They contribute to other Kansas City theatres. In fact, Dennis Hennessy recently directed the wonderful production of *Dinner with Friends* at Actors Theatre KC. And speaking of dinner, they always cook more of everything than needed at any New Theatre performance, and the leftovers are carefully distributed through Harvesters. Then there are the scholarships, and this is where Dodie Brown added her moving and shaking. She founded the New Theatre Guild in 1994 for charitable and educational purposes. By 2006, it had awarded $46,820 in scholarships to Kansas City area theatre students. Dick and Dennis and Dodie, the Kansas City theatre community salutes you!

A theatre company that is particularly dear to my heart is Heart of America Shakespeare Festival. Because of my close association with it, I have to trace its development through my personal experience, although that is certainly not the whole story. In 1990, I began research on a book for Greenwood Press titled *Shakespeare Companies and Festivals: An International Guide*. My two co-authors—Ron Engle and Dan Watermeier—and I divided up the United States, and I got the Midwest and South. That summer, I visited a dozen Shakespeare festivals, seeing productions, photographing facilities, interviewing their artistic directors and other personnel, collecting copies of their publicity materials, budgets, and mission statements. In Texas alone, I saw seven different Shakespeare productions at four different Shakespeare theatres, each with a very different profile. During my conversation with Sidney Berger, founder and artistic director of Houston Shakespeare Festival, I learned that he wanted to start a networking organization for the 120 or so American companies and festivals devoted to Shakespeare. When Sidney called Joseph Papp at the New York Shakespeare Festival to invite his participation, Papp's response was surprisingly hostile. Apparently, free outdoor Shakespeare in a park was supposed to be synonymous with the name Joseph Papp, and provincial upstarts had no business trying to steal his thunder. Yes, this sounds ridiculous, because we certainly had American outdoor Shakespeare festivals—although not necessarily admission-free ones—before Papp staked his claim in New York's Central Park.[6] But Sidney Berger is to be believed. His recounting of Papp's response is similar to what I later heard from Papp's close associate Melia Bensussen, and from theatre people I met in Poland only two weeks after Papp had visited there. In any event, Sidney simply ignored Papp's objections and, in January 1991, called an organizational meeting in Washington D.C. Approximately 15 directors of Shakespeare festivals attended and the Shakespeare Theatre Association of America was founded. Sidney Berger was elected founding president with Doug Cook of the Utah Shakespearean Festival as vice president, and I was elected secretary.

My first of two summers of travels to Shakespeare festivals also put me in contact with Cindy Phaneuf, co-founder and artistic director of the Nebraska Shakespeare Festival, for which I then became the dramaturg. At the end of summer 1990, I was convinced that Kansas City needed an admission-free outdoor Shakespeare venture. Luckily, my UMKC colleague Dale Rose was the former artistic director of the Dallas Shakespeare Festival, so he really knew the ropes. Dale and I went to Jim Costin to discuss the possibility of a Kansas City Shakespeare Festival sponsored by UMKC. Jim cautioned us that the UMKC arts fundraising pie was already sliced thin, but on the other hand, George Keathley had been looking for something for Missouri Repertory Theatre to do in Spencer Theatre during the summer, and Jim suggested that we write up a proposal. Dale and I were talking up our ideas everywhere we went, and Rebekah Presson[7] said I needed to get in touch with Marilyn Strauss. She gave me Marilyn's phone number, so I called and got an appointment to meet Marilyn at her apartment on September 28, 1990.

Marilyn Strauss had been doing volunteer fundraising for the outdoor musicals of Theatre under the Stars at Penn Valley Park and saw the possibilities for adding Shakespeare into the mix

6. In *The Shakespeare Complex* (Drama Book Specialists, New York, 1975), Glenn Loney and Patricia McKay document twelve summer Shakespeare festivals in existence at that time, although not all of them were open-air.

7. She is now Rebekah Presson Mosby, a Grammy-nominated producer of recorded poetry readings.

and getting support from Kansas City Parks and Recreation. In fact, she had already scheduled a meeting with Anita Gorman and invited me to join them. Although my teaching schedule prevented me from accepting Marilyn's generous invitation, I was able to supply some sample budgets from free festivals for Marilyn to take to the meeting. Marilyn persuaded Parks and Recreation to drop its insistence on a musical and to support an all-Shakespeare project.

My next step was to bring together Marilyn Strauss and Dale Rose. The three of us strategized giving UMKC one more chance to get in on the project. We planned what we called a "seduction dinner" at Marilyn's apartment to seduce Jim Costin and George Keathley into pooling some of the resources of Missouri Repertory Theatre into the venture. It was a lovely catered gourmet candlelight dinner on November 19, 1990, at which we presented our proposed budgets and organizational plans. Although there were no immediate results from that dinner, Marilyn was charging ahead and having meetings with dozens of Kansas City civic leaders. After every meeting, Marilyn would call me and I would type up yet another revised version of a proposed budget or organizational plan and take it over to her apartment, sometimes twice a day. That was long before any of us owned a computer, and my old appointment book from those days before email shows endless phone calls. For every one call between Marilyn and me, she made a dozen or more, seeking funding and business guidance, drumming up interest, creating a contact list for the Bard Club she envisioned as a support group.

With Marilyn's enlistment of supporters from Avila and Rockhurst, the venture developed beyond one that could be exclusively tied to UMKC. The name evolved from Missouri Shakespeare Festival to the one on the incorporation papers I signed with her on May 1, 1991: Shakespeare Festival of Greater Kansas City. By the time of the inaugural production in summer of 1993, we had settled on the right name: Heart of America Shakespeare Festival. In the spring of 1992, things really picked up steam as the "bard club," then called Strictly Shakespeare, hosted a series of Shakespeare-related events at various area theatres. A highlight was the April visit of Charles Vere, Lord Burford, who spoke on the Shakespeare authorship question, making the case for Edward DeVere, 17th Earl of Oxford, as the man who used the pen-name William Shake-speare.

Also that spring Crosby Kemper III began hosting a series of lunches at United Missouri Bank for potential funders. I got to attend these lunches and give a ten-minute version of my slide presentation showing free outdoor Shakespeare festivals I had visited in other cities. Cris Kemper also formed a board of directors on which I had the pleasure of serving for twelve consecutive years. Under the excellent board leadership of Shirley Helzberg and Dan Bukovac, we weathered a lot of ups and downs over the years. Under the artistic direction of Bruce Levitt from 1997 to 2000, the festival expanded to two plays in a four-week rotating repertory. Bruce and his general manager Joe Wilson both became active members of the Shakespeare Theatre Association of America.

With auditions in January 1993 for the inaugural production of *The Tempest* that summer, the evolution of Heart of America Shakespeare Festival becomes a matter of public record, which there is no need for me to reiterate here. As it celebrates its sixteenth season in 2008, we can all be proud of Heart of America Shakespeare Festival as one of the crown jewels of summer in Kansas City, still admission-free (which means a lot of behind-the-scenes fundraising and generous contributions) and still drawing the most diverse audience demographic of any theatre in the area.[8]

8. This is my opportunity to write into the record an idea I brought to the board several times over the years and still believe to be viable. It is based upon what Three Rivers Shakespeare Festival did in Pittsburgh in the 1980s. I wanted Heart of America Shakespeare Festival to contract with the Kauffman Performing Arts Center project to be the resident company in a theatre facility for legitimate drama, as originally planned for the complex. There HASF could produce a full season of classic plays (including two or three Shakespeare plays) for a paying audience. Then one or two of those pre-paid Shakespeare productions could be taken to the park the following summer to be presented admission free. The beauty of the plan is not only reducing the horrendous amount of fundraising to be done each season, but also giving Kansas City theatergoers a full season of the classics to remedy the fact that young people today grow up without any exposure to the great works of dramatic literature.

There was no way in the time available today for me to give you a complete picture of the riches of Kansas City's live theatre scene during my three decades here. I could have talked about brilliant artistic leaders like Jeff Church, who led the Coterie to its well-deserved listing by *Time* magazine as one of the five top children's theatres in the nation; Cynthia Levin, who nurtured the Unicorn into national prominence; Jeanne Beechwood, who created a special theatrical niche with Martin City Melodrama; Linda Ade Brand, extraordinary director of comedies and musicals; the late Jim Assad, who founded American Heartland Theatre; and the late unforgettable Robin Humphrey, who lent her vivacity and talent to productions all over the metroplex; as well as many, many other talented Kansas City theatre artists.

But I cannot conclude without a mention of one more lasting legacy of Patricia McIlrath, and that is the professional theatre training program of UMKC's Department of Theatre. Because most of us on the Theatre faculty worked with Dr. Mac, we have been blessed with the collaborative spirit and undaunted passion to carry on and actually be strengthened by adversity. Under the persevering and outstanding leadership of our department chair Tom Mardikes, UMKC Theatre has established itself as a nationally renowned artistic entity that no longer relies upon the Rep to attract the best students and give them the professional associations and experience they crave. We are engaged this season in co-productions with Kansas City's other prominent professional theatres: the Unicorn and the Coterie. Our internationally and nationally respected faculty includes Barry Kyle, Ricardo Khan, Erika Bailey, Lindsay Davis, John Ezell, Gene Friedman, Chuck Hayes, Frank Higgins, Gary Holcombe, Don Hovis, Tom Mardikes, Jennifer Martin, Joe Price, Stephanie Roberts, Ted Swetz, and Victor En Yu Tan. The names of UMKC Theatre alums—designers, stage managers, technicians, actors—grace the Playbills of several Broadway productions each season, and now they are making themselves known also on the West Coast. But you don't need to take my word for it. If you saw our artistically thrilling and heartwarming and moving *Twelfth Night* last spring or our hilarious and technically challenging *Noises Off* earlier this month, you know what I mean. This is top-quality theatre! You will not want to miss UMKC Theatre's premier production of *Quindaro*, a new work created here, about our regional African American history. It opens on February 13, 2008, on the H&R Block City Stage in Union Station, directed by Ricardo Khan.

Whichever ones of our Kansas City theatres you choose to attend regularly, you will be not only enriching yourself but—by supporting artists who have chosen to make their careers and homes here—contributing to a richer quality of life for all.

Bibliography

Dorr, Joel. "Theatre Business 101—Where the Patron is Priority One," *DramaBiz Magazine* (May/June 2006), 14-19.

Einig, Anne Christine. "Dr. Patricia McIlrath: Founder and Artistic Director of the Missouri Repertory Theatre," a Master of Arts thesis in Theatre, University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2000.

Engle, Ron, Felicia Hardison Londré, and Daniel J. Watermeier, eds. *Shakespeare Companies and Festivals: An International Guide*. Westport, Ct.: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1995.

Gould, Raymond R. "Missouri Repertory Theatre: A History of Productions," unpublished manuscript (1992) in the Patricia McIlrath Center for Mid-American Theatre, Performing Arts Center, University of Missouri-Kansas City.

Humphrey, Michael. "The Unsinkable Dodie Brown," *Star Magazine* (*The Kansas City Star*, 27 February 2005), 8-12.

Kelman, Stephanie. "Arthur Wayland Ellison: A Kansas City Actor," a Master of Arts thesis in Theatre, University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2006.

Londré, Felicia Hardison. "Documented Chronology of the Origins of Heart of America Shakespeare Festival," unpublished manuscript in the Patricia McIlrath Center for Mid-American Theatre, Performing Arts Center, University of Missouri-Kansas City.

_____. *The Enchanted Years of the Stage: Kansas City at the Crossroads of American Theater, 1870-1930*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007.

Loney, Glenn and Patricia McKay. *The Shakespeare Complex: A guide to summer festivals and year-round repertory in North America*. New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1975.

Martin, Rebecca Simpson. "Robin Humphrey: The Teaching Artist," a Master of Arts thesis in Theatre, University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2005.

Olson, James and Vera. *The University of Missouri: An Illustrated History.* Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1988.

Robinson, Alice M., Vera Mowry Roberts, and Milly S. Barranger, eds. *Notable Women in the American Theatre: A Biographical Dictionary*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1989. "Patricia Anne McIlrath" by Felicia Hardison Londré, pp. 618-621.

Trussell, Robert. "Dinner and a Show," *The Kansas City Star* (7 January 2007), F1, F 12.

Questions and Answers

Boutros: We have time for questions. Anyone?

Comment: You answered a lot! (laughter)

Question: A prediction for the future of theater in America?

Londré: Wow. Yes, we are always worried that live theatre is going to die out because of all the challenges of television and movies, and now the Internet. But it certainly has weathered a lot of challenges, and as Patricia McIlrath said, people need live theatre. A flat-screen entertainment apparently does not expand the imagination as live theatre does. You need that three-dimensionality, and that space, and being in the presence of other human beings to stimulate the imagination. It will make us all better, wiser, more interesting people. So, theatre is not going to die, but we all have to do our parts to nurture it.

Question: You suggested that audiences like to see local actors again and again in different plays. Does that have a drawing affect on theatre?

Londré: Yes, obviously there are two ways of seeing that. I wish that Mark Robbins were here to answer that question because he has spoken eloquently on the subject of what it means for an actor to perform in repertoire in the same season or for two nights in a row playing very different characters. And audiences do love to see familiar actors coming back and to see them do very different things. On the other hand, there is something to be said for bringing in new people from outside to stimulate us and refresh us and challenge us. I think it has to be a balance. But I think first we do need to take care of our own and support them, and then to also support them by offering them a chance to interact with others who have been working elsewhere. Tom, did you want to answer that too?

Tom Mardikes: I would just add that part of the problem is because of television that too many actors are cast in a type—asked to do the same thing over and over again. The actors in a training program are really trained to change themselves—physically, emotionally, intellectually, spiritually—based upon what they are playing. And all too often the artistic directors are not asking for that. So if you play a Romeo type, then you do Romeo, and you do Romeo, and you do Romeo, and you do Romeo. That gets boring for both the audience and the actors.

Boutros: Any additional questions or comments? Thank you for coming.

WHMC-KC

The Western Historical Manuscript Collection, a joint collection of the University of Missouri and the State Historical Society of Missouri, contains primary source materials for research and welcomes use by scholars, students, and the public. Our network allows for the full resources of the Collection—the holdings of all four branches in Columbia, Kansas City, Rolla, and St. Louis—to be available to researchers throughout the state.

The Kansas City office opened in 1980 with a mission to collect, preserve, and make available for research, documents relating to the history and culture of Kansas City, western Missouri, and the Midwest. Since that time, approximately 12,000 cubic feet of documents have been acquired. The Collection owns the papers of important **civic and political leaders** such as Charles Kimball, Ilus Davis, Charles Wheeler, Oscar Nelson, H.P. Wright, Lou Holland, William Volker, and L. Perry Cookingham; the records of **businesses and industries** such as the Kansas City Board of Trade, the Kansas City Stock Exchange, and the J.C. Nichols Company; a very large collection of materials relating to **Kansas City's built environment**, including the records of the architectural and planning firms of Hoit, Price and Barnes, Wight and Wight, and Hare and Hare, among others; the records of **not-for-profit civic and social organizations**, including the Chamber of Commerce of Greater Kansas City, the Kansas City PTA, the Woman's City Club, and the National Council of Jewish Women; the papers of **scholars and historians** who have researched and written on Kansas City's history, including materials from the Kansas City History Project, and the papers of Bill Goff, Lyle Kennedy, A. Theodore Brown, and James Anderson; and a variety of other collections dealing with such diverse topics as labor unions, the Battle of Westport, music and cultural arts in Kansas City, neighborhood development, civil rights, Kansas City school desegregation, and the overland trails.

Questions about the use of or donations to the Collection should be directed to David Boutros, Associate Director of the Kansas City office. (816) 235-1543; WHMCKC@umkc.edu.

www.umkc.edu/WHMCKC/

Cover photo: The full Missouri Repertory Theatre (MRT) Company in 1974. Dr. Patricia A. McIlrath is seated at the far right in the third row from the bottom. Standing in that row (in a dark jacket) is Art Ellison. *Felicia Hardison Londré Papers (KC:3/25/4), UMKC University Archives.*

Western Historical Manuscript Collection-Kansas City
302 Newcomb Hall
University of Missouri-Kansas City
5100 Rockhill Road
Kansas City, Missouri 64110-2499