

FAILURE IN KANSAS CITY: A STUDY OF AN
ATTEMPT TO FOUND A PROFESSIONAL THEATRE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. IMPORTANCE, JUSTIFICATION AND BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM

The growing concern of theatre practitioners and patrons about the state of dramatic art in the country finally began to result in some positive action in the years after World War II. This action was in the form of many new professional theatres which began to be established throughout the nation at that time. The focal point for much of the concern had been the specific condition of professional theatre in the City of New York. Much criticism had been and still is leveled at the restraints imposed by the growing commercial nature of productions, both on Broadway, and more recently, Off-Broadway.¹ One ameliorating development is the decentralization of professional theatre to metropolitan areas outside of New York City. The advantages of this type of professional activity are stated succinctly in the Rockefeller Panel Report on the Performing Arts:

¹John D. Rockefeller 3rd and others, The Performing Arts: Problems and Prospects (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1965), pp. 33-37.

The rise of the nonprofit permanent professional theatres is one of the most promising phenomena on the performing arts scene. They seem to point the way toward a long-awaited expansion of theatre--in both artistic and geographic terms. In effect, the growth of the nonprofit professional playhouses represents an attempt to create a new theatrical structure to co-exist with the traditional commercial one.²

Clearly, the Rockefeller Panel does not expect these professional companies to replace the traditional organization of the commercial theatre, but rather to supplement the existent, New York-oriented structure. That permanent professional theatre companies are growing in many regional centers outside of New York is apparent from an appendix to this same report, which lists forty-nine such theatres in existence in 1965.³

Kansas City was not on the list compiled by the Panel. However, as early as January of 1964 The Kansas City Star carried an article examining the state of theatre in this metropolitan area. Giles Fowler, author of the article, thought that the existence of several community theatres was harmful because of the diffusion of talent it caused.⁴ A possible solution to the dilemma was suggested by Professor Patricia McIlrath, Director of Theatre at the

²Ibid., p. 42.

³Ibid., pp. 231-33.

⁴News item in The Kansas City Star, January 12, 1964.

University of Missouri at Kansas City, who expressed her belief, in an interview with Fowler, that the establishment of a permanent professional theatre in Kansas City could be the cure for many of the city's theatrical ills.⁵

Plans for establishing just such a theatre were not long in taking form. In the April 15, 1965, issue of The Kansas City Times Fowler discussed the appointment by Mayor Ilus W. Davis of the Professional Theatre Planning Committee to study the feasibility of establishing a professional theatre in Greater Kansas City.⁶ In the August 19, 1965, issue of The Kansas City Times Fowler announced the hiring of Barton H. Emmet, former administrative head of the highly successful Minnesota Theatre Company at the Tyrone Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis, to head the project in Kansas City.⁷ However, for reasons to be determined in this thesis, the project failed to come to fruition.

Kenneth L. Graham, writing in a special issue of the Educational Theatre Journal, discusses the importance of the study of attempts to establish professional theatres outside New York City:

⁵Ibid.

⁶News item in The Kansas City Times, April 15, 1965.

⁷News item in The Kansas City Times, August 19, 1965.

Because these relatively new extensions of the professional theatre are still in the pioneering stage, various studies should be undertaken, and collections of case histories especially dealing with economic and organizational problems should be assembled and made available to interested parties. By citing instances of both success and failure, these case histories would be of inestimable value to those assuming these new responsibilities for supporting the American theatre.

This thesis is clearly justified on the basis that one can learn from a failure the mistakes to be avoided in a similar project.

B. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This thesis will present a critical analysis of the specific attempt, headed by Barton H. Emmet, to found a permanent professional theatre in the Kansas City area; this analysis will focus on the history of the venture in order to discover the reasons why that attempt did not result in the founding of a theatre.

1. DEFINITION OF TERMS

The only term which needs definition is "permanent professional theatre." The definition is derived from the Rockefeller Panel Report on the Performing Arts:

⁸Kenneth L. Graham, "Relationships Between Educational Theatre and Professional Theatre," Educational Theatre Journal, XVIII (November, 1966), 354.

By "permanent professional theatres" we mean those having management and policy continuity, playing extended seasons, generally of twenty weeks or more. The terms "resident theatre," "regional theatre," and "repertory theatre" have been used variously to describe the nonprofit permanent professional theatres outside of New York. We have chosen to avoid using these terms because they have been given such a wide variety of meanings and are not truly descriptive of all theatres that fall in the same category.⁹

2. HYPOTHESES

There are two major questions which must be answered in this thesis: what constituted the attempt to found a permanent professional theatre in Kansas City, and what caused the attempt to fail? The first question will be answered by the critical examination of the events. The second question can be answered by the hypothesis that failure was the result of insufficient funding for the project and/or the inability of the Mayor's Professional Theatre Planning Committee, the interested public and Emmet to work to mutual advantage.

C. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

An investigation of The Speech Teacher, Educational Theatre Journal, Speech Monographs, Dissertation Abstracts, and Quarterly Journal of Speech did not reveal any previous

⁹Rockefeller 3r, op. cit., p. 38.

studies of this specific project. However, studies of the formation of the Minnesota Theatre Company are pertinent to this thesis. The Kansas City project was intended from the beginning to result in a theatre similar in many respects to the one in Minneapolis. Giles Fowler expressed this viewpoint succinctly:

The original idea of the project was to form a professional theatre here of the highest caliber. Within this philosophy we felt that we ought to take the Tyrone Guthrie approach which was to begin with a building and company simultaneously. We felt that if you had the building on the way and the money raised, the company would be easy enough to come by. In other words, this was going to be a very splashy beginning.¹⁰

Two unpublished theses by former students at the University of Kansas were examined; neither proved pertinent to the present thesis. The first, written by Leigh Heilman, focuses on the life of Douglas Campbell and his artistic contributions to the Minnesota Theatre Company.¹¹ Larry Soller's thesis contains some information on the formation

¹⁰Giles M. Fowler, Drama and Motion Picture Editor, The Kansas City Star, personal interview, Kansas City, Missouri, July 1, 1969. All subsequent references to Fowler in this chapter will be from this interview, except where he is cited as author of a newspaper article.

¹¹Leigh Heilman, "Douglas Campbell and his direction of Plays at the Tyrone Guthrie Theatre: 1963-1965" (unpublished Master's thesis, The University of Kansas, Lawrence, 1966).

of the company.¹² However, this information is covered in more depth in In Search of an Audience, a work written by Bradley G. Morison and Kay Fliehr, who formerly headed the Publicity Department of the Tyrone Guthrie Theatre.¹³ Therefore, this work will be used whenever references or comparisons to the Minneapolis venture are necessary.

D. PROCEDURES

1. ORGANIZATION

This thesis has marshalled data from two main sources: The Kansas City Star and personal interviews with Irvine O. Hockaday, Jr., Giles M. Fowler, Dr. Patricia McIlrath and Morton I. Sosland, members of the Mayor's Professional Theatre Planning Committee. A compilation of the information gathered from the newspapers and the interviews disclosed the history of the effort. Consequently, the second chapter of this thesis is a description of the development of the Kansas City project. The third chapter is an analysis of the reasons for the failure of that attempt.

¹²Larry S. Soller, "The Second and Third Years of Operation of the Tyrone Guthrie Theatre" (unpublished Master's thesis, The University of Kansas, Lawrence, 1966).

¹³Kay Fliehr and Bradley G. Morison, In Search of an Audience (New York: Pitman Publishing Corporation, 1968).

The fourth and final chapter is a summary and statement of conclusions drawn from the evaluation of the data.

2. METHODS OR CRITERIA FOR INTERPRETATION

Since a study of this nature is relatively new, no objective body of criteria is available. Therefore, the bases for interpretation of the data gathered are comparatively general concepts of theatre management and the insights of the people interviewed.

These management concepts used as interpretative bases for the study include questions of funding, personnel, facilities and morale. The sources, amounts and continuity of funding from the public and/or private sector is a matter of concern. The kinds of people needed and their availability is a key area to be examined in terms of personnel. In terms of facilities two questions must be answered: what kind of facilities were needed for the project, and did these exist or would they have to be built? Questions of morale are based on what Kansas Citians were willing to give up in order to get their own professional theatre and their degree of determination to complete the project. Included in this final area of inquiry is the matter of public relations.

CHAPTER II

A CHRONICLE OF THE ATTEMPT

This chapter is a narrative of the events which occurred in connection with the Emmet-headed attempt to found a professional theatre in the Kansas City area, from its inception to the day that the project was officially abandoned. Critical evaluation of the data is reserved for Chapter Three of this thesis. The information presented here is derived primarily from articles and news items in The Kansas City Star. This chapter contains three divisions. The first division examines events prior to the formation of the Mayor's Professional Theatre Planning Committee. The second division is concerned with events after the Committee was formed, but prior to the hiring of Emmet. The third, and final, division focuses on the events which occurred after Emmet was hired.

A. PROLOGUE

In January of 1964 Kansas City was witnessing an abundance of theatrical activity. Productions were either playing or were being readied for opening at four local playhouses: The Resident Theatre, The Circle, U. M. K. C.'s University Playhouse and the Mark Playhouse. Such an

apparent wealth of live drama in the city would seem to indicate cause for optimism for the future of theatre in Kansas City. However, some degree of pessimism was evinced by Giles Fowler:

Yet community theatres compete--with each other, with professional drama, with concerts, films, opera and sports--for the local entertainment dollar. They also compete for trained personnel. And it is in this latter area that the pressure is greatest, according to most theater persons here.¹

The various theatres competed both for actors and for audiences. Good actors were much in demand, and they usually went to the playhouse that offered them the best part. In an interview by Fowler, Dr. Patricia McIlrath, Director of the University Playhouse, offered her response to the problem of actor shortages:

Our majors have always taken part in other productions around the city, but recently the problem has increased. Now we've been forced to confine them to work on our own stage. Certainly, we're sorry for the other theaters that need help, but there's nothing else we can do.²

Professor McIlrath further felt that the answer to the problems of scarcity of actors and audiences might very well lie in the formation of a professional theatre in Kansas City. She saw tremendous potential in this type of theatre as an

¹News item in The Kansas City Star, January 12, 1964.

²Ibid.

audience-builder and goal for local actors:

If there were just one truly professional company here, then I wouldn't say we had too many community theaters. The whole climate would be better. Amateurs would be aiming toward professionalism themselves; the community groups would have a goal in training. But with no professional theater here, I'm afraid I'd have to say there are too many community groups in Kansas City.³

At that time the Mark Playhouse and The Circle both intended to become professional operations. Jed Davis, a member of the University of Kansas theatre faculty, felt that the potential audience for theatre existed in Kansas City, but that this audience was not being fully realized because of the lack of a unifying force. In an interview by Fowler, Davis observed that other cities found audiences for their community theatres:

. . . many smaller cities sustain healthy community theaters, and in Minneapolis, where the professional Tyrone Guthrie theater is making an international name for itself, many non-professional groups continue to thrive.⁴

Three important factors were at work in these early months of 1964. First, people interested in theatre were generally dissatisfied with the theatrical situation as it was at that time in the city. Secondly, the possibility of professional

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

theatre as the answer to this dissatisfaction was being suggested. Finally, the Tyrone Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis was mentioned as a possible model to which Kansas Citians could look.

Henry C. Haskell, associate editor of The Kansas City Star, discussed the Kansas City theatre situation in an article printed in the paper on October 4, 1964. Haskell pointed out that live theatre had been no novelty to earlier generations in the city, but that the present generation had grown up accustomed to the lack of stage drama. Haskell felt that the time was again ripe for professional theatre in Kansas City, and he commented on the possibilities of such a venture in the city:

. . . The U. M. K. C. Playhouse experimented last summer with a professional company in residence. The success of that trial run suggests the possibility that this might ultimately become the basis for an operation like the one at the Guthrie theater.

In any case, the challenge of the Guthrie enterprise, it would appear to me, ought not much longer be ignored in a community like ours which seeks to offer its own inhabitants--and those resident in the surrounding area--all the key facilities associated with modern metropolitan life.⁵

Official action on the Kansas City theatre dilemma came four months after Haskell's article. Mayor Ilus W. Davis called

⁵News item in The Kansas City Star, October 4, 1964.

a meeting of business and cultural leaders of the city at the Nelson Art Gallery for February 16, 1965, to discuss the formation of a professional theatre company for the Greater Kansas City area.⁶ With this action the foundation was laid for the formation of the Mayor's Professional Theatre Planning Committee.

B. FORMATION OF THE COMMITTEE

The February sixteenth meeting, to which three hundred people were invited, was intended by the Mayor to be of an exploratory nature. Interested people in the community had brought to the Mayor's attention the necessity of studying the feasibility of establishing a professional theatre to serve the Kansas City metropolitan area. Mayor Davis agreed that such investigative discussion was needed at that time:

I believe perhaps now the time is right to explore the theater needs of Kansas City. The purpose of this meeting will be to explore the needs and possibilities for the establishment of a first-class theater in Kansas City and present us an opportunity to learn something of the practical problems involved with such an operation from the men who led the establishment of the theater in Minneapolis.⁷

⁶News item in The Kansas City Star, February 7, 1965.

⁷Ibid.

The men from Minneapolis were Louis Zelle, a founder and vice-president of the Minnesota Theatre Company, and Barton H. Emmet, then the company's administrative director. These men were the principle speakers at the meeting. Based on the speeches of Emmet and Zelle and others at the meeting, four basic tenets emerged:

That the Kansas City area, serving a broad region of the Middle West, needs a professional drama company, if it is to fulfill its role as a major metropolis.

That such a company can be obtained, if there is sufficient agreement it is needed and a local willingness to work and pay for its organization.

That a professional theater, in heightening the city's attractiveness as a place to live and visit, would yield enormous benefits to the area's educational quality and to its business and industrial climate.

Finally, that the key to success in such a venture lies, above anything else, with the quality of theater it provides.⁸

Two points were especially stressed in Fowler's article on the meeting: that the theatre could be built if people would work hard for it, and that the goal must be the best theatre possible. One result of the gathering was the appointment of a nominating group to select a steering committee for the establishment of a professional theatre.⁹

⁸News item in The Kansas City Times, February 17, 1965.

⁹Ibid.

The names of the steering committee were announced in the press on April 15, 1965.¹⁰ These names and the occupations of the people are listed below in their entirety for reasons which are made clear in the next chapter of this thesis.¹¹

No time was wasted in getting this committee organized. A memo dated April 16, 1965, from Hockaday to the Professional Theatre Planning Committee, concisely stated the responsibility of that Committee.

To explore the feasibility of establishing a permanent, professional theatre in the Kansas City area and to report back to the community with specific recommendations as to the attainment of this goal.¹²

Contained in the memo were specific suggestions for carrying out the duties of the Committee. Five key questions were

¹⁰News item in The Kansas City Times, April 15, 1965.

¹¹"Irvine O. Hockaday, Jr., lawyer, and chairman of the committee; W. Howard Adams, president of the Missouri Council on the Arts; Dr. Patricia McIlrath, chairman of the speech and theater department of the University of Missouri at Kansas City; Morton I. Sosland, assistant editor of the Southwestern Miller; Alfred J. Blasco, chairman of the executive committee of the Interstate Securities company; Edward F. Kander, a vice-president and resident manager of the Meinrath Brokerage company; Kenneth M. Myers, lawyer; Mrs. Thomas J. McGreevy and Mrs. Nick Huston, active participants in community theatre here; and Giles M. Fowler, drama editor of The Kansas City Star."

¹²Memo to the Professional Theatre Planning Committee from Irvine O. Hockaday, Jr., April 16, 1965. (Contained in Mr. Hockaday's personal files).

offered for exploration by the members. First, what facilities and personnel were then available in Kansas City? Second, what business and artistic personnel were available elsewhere? Third, what kind of theatre should be formed in the area, including innovations and/or additions, and the possibility of working with existent groups? Fourth, what was the degree of preparation of the audience in the community for a theatre of professional caliber? Fifth, what were the various sources and availability of funds for the project? All of the questions were meant to get the members thinking about the task ahead of them. A final item on the memo mentioned the arrival of Tyrone Guthrie in two weeks for a short visit in Kansas City.¹³

The Mayor's Professional Theatre Planning Committee, the Missouri Council on the Arts, and the University of Missouri at Kansas City co-sponsored Guthrie's visit to Kansas City. The purpose of the visit was to try to arouse public interest in the professional theatre project. Guthrie, in a lecture at the University Playhouse, stressed the importance of theatre for enriching the lives of people in a city. In regard to Kansas City, Guthrie felt that a theatre of equal caliber to the one in Minneapolis could be

¹³Ibid.

built if the wealthy and influential people of the city would lead the community in supporting such a venture. He did not think that a beautiful theatre building was an essential ingredient for attracting talented theatre personnel to the city and pointed to the fact that, at Stratford, Ontario, they had begun in a tent. In answer to a query from the audience as to what the first step should be in obtaining a theatre company, Guthrie replied, "Go first for one or two people who would run the theater, one or two people willing to take a chance on you who've got some guts."¹⁴ Barton Emmet had accompanied Tyrone Guthrie on this trip to Kansas City.

The Committee spent the summer of 1965 studying possible locations for a theatre building, working on the eventual artistic policy of the company, and searching for a project administrative director. During this period the Committee was incorporated into a nonprofit group called the Repertory Theater Development Fund. Three members were added to the original group: Mrs. R. Crosby Kemper, Jr.; James Nichol, president of the First National Bank of Independence; and Jack M. Rees, interior decorator.¹⁵

¹⁴News item in The Kansas City Times, April 29, 1965.

¹⁵News item in The Kansas City Times, August 4, 1965.

On August 19, 1965, the signing of Emmet to head the Kansas City project was announced by Irvine Hockaday and published in The Kansas City Times. Emmet had visited Kansas City on several occasions since his trip to the city with Guthrie. Hockaday and others had been negotiating with Emmet throughout the summer. The result was that Emmet left an important administrative post with the Minnesota Theatre Company in order to accept the position as executive director of the Kansas City project.¹⁶

C. EMMET AND THE MAYOR'S

PROFESSIONAL THEATRE PLANNING COMMITTEE

Emmet was coming to Kansas City with an extensive eighteen-year background in theatre management. For ten years, from 1947 to 1957, he had been owner, manager and director of the Westchester Playhouse at Mt. Kisco, New York. From 1958 to 1961 he had been resident manager of the American Shakespeare festival at Stratford, Connecticut. With the Tyrone Guthrie Theatre from 1962 to 1965, Emmet had been deeply involved with all of the business aspects of that operation.¹⁷

¹⁶News item in The Kansas City Times, August 19, 1965.

¹⁷Ibid.

Although Emmet was not to assume his new position until October first, he made some preliminary statements in August about the proposed theatre:

That artistic excellence must be the theater's first goal.

That the company must serve the whole public at reasonable prices, and not merely a cultural elite.

That it would provide a major cultural advantage not just for Greater Kansas City, but for a huge Mid-Western region.¹⁸

Emmet's first duties with the Committee were: (1) determining the design and cost of a theatre building; (2) deciding on a site for the building; (3) exploring possibilities of financing the whole venture; (4) setting up of basic business and artistic policies; and (5) investigating the possibilities of working with existing performing arts institutions in the city. Hockaday stressed the importance of professional guidance from a man such as Emmet if a project the size of the one they were undertaking were to succeed.¹⁹

Shortly before Emmet officially began his work in Kansas City, a group of prominent business and cultural leaders from the Greater Kansas City area visited the Tyrone Guthrie Theatre. More than forty persons, led by Mayor

¹⁸Ibid. ¹⁹Ibid.

Davis and Irvine Hockaday, boarded an airplane on September twenty-fifth for a two day visit to the Twin Cities. The trip had two primary purposes:

First, . . . acquaint various Greater Kansas City leaders with what Minnesotans have accomplished in the way of a successful professional theater operation. The Twin Cities are about the same size as Greater Kansas City.

Second, . . . provide a chance to examine origins of the Guthrie theater, and its effects on the economy and cultural climate of its community.²⁰

Barton Emmet, who was still with the Guthrie Theatre at that time, met the group when they arrived in Minneapolis and acted as their host throughout the stay. The visitors saw two productions by the Minnesota Theatre Company and were conducted on an extensive tour of the theatre's operations. At a luncheon for the Kansas City group, theatre backers from the Minneapolis community told of some of the advantages of having a professional theatre in their city:

. . . that 250,000 people a year see serious drama at the Guthrie Theater and that 23 per cent of this total are people from outside the Minneapolis area. They also said that the cultural aspects of the Twin Cities, which includes Guthrie Theater, annually out-draw the combined totals of the two professional athletic teams there.²¹

²⁰News item in The Kansas City Times, September 16, 1965.

²¹"Visit to Minneapolis Theater Boosts Kansas City Interest," Kansas Citian, 54 (November 2, 1965), 19.

The speakers illustrated the fact that in their city, at least, professional theatre could offer not only aesthetic pleasure, but economic benefits as well. The trip was apparently successful and favorable comments from people who had attended were quoted in the press.²²

On October 1, 1965, Emmet moved into his new offices on Westport Road in Kansas City.²³ Two days later, a guardedly optimistic article by Fowler appeared in The Kansas City Star. Fowler repeated the praise of Emmet's talent and background, but urged all of the people in the Kansas City area to stand behind the project in order to make it succeed.²⁴

Sometime later, a lengthy public statement by Barton Emmet appeared in the form of an article which he wrote for The Kansas City Star. The article contains an eloquent plea for theatre in general and in particular in the Kansas City area to improve its cultural image to the rest of the world. Emmet felt that the new professional theatre would not hurt the existing non-professional community theatre groups in the area, but rather would stimulate interest in all

²²Ibid.

²³News item in The Kansas City Star, October 3, 1965.

²⁴Ibid.

theatrical activity. He insisted that all productions should be of the highest caliber possible since bad or mediocre performances of plays are damaging to the cause of theatre as a whole.²⁵

Emmet thought that the proposed theatre in Kansas City should be basically concerned with productions of plays which have stood the tests of time and critics. However, this should not exclude major American playwrights whose plays have not been with us long enough to have withstood these tests. New playwrights should also get a hearing through the use of an experimental workshop at the theatre. In terms of the type of theatre facility necessary for the Kansas City venture, Emmet firmly believed that the thrust stage, which is used at the Guthrie Theatre, was the answer for the following reasons:

In a theater with a thrust stage where the audience sits around the stage in a 200 degree arc, you create the illusion of a theater about one-third its size. Nobody sits more than 13 rows from the stage or about 55 feet, which is well in the area of the highest priced seats in any proscenium theater. Everyone can see and hear clearly. Even more important, it brings the actors out into the audience where they share the same space, literally breathe the same air.²⁶

²⁵News item in The Kansas City Star, November 21, 1965.

²⁶Ibid.

Finally, Emmet reminded the readers that the venture would cost a lot of money (amount not specified), but that this investment could pay off by making Kansas City not only the geographic heart of the United States, but also ". . . the cultural, scientific, educational and business heart as well."²⁷

One of the primary concerns of the Committee and Emmet from the beginning of the project had been the location of a suitable site for the proposed theatre. By late December of 1965, nine sites were under consideration. Four of these locations were receiving special interest. The first would have located the theatre above an eleven-level garage structure being built between Ninth and Tenth streets on Main. Robert P. Ingram, developer of that project, had offered the space above the garage as a penthouse site for the theatre. The space itself would have been provided free of charge, but the theatre would have had to be built from public donations. One advantage, other than the downtown location, of this placement of the facility was the ample theatre parking which would have been available beneath the theatre itself. Ingram had hoped that the proposed theatre could have housed not only the professional theatre company,

²⁷Ibid.

but the Kansas City Civic Ballet and the Lyric Opera Company as well. Architects of the garage project had estimated the cost of construction of the theatre facility at about \$2,250,000.²⁸

The second site would have located the theatre on land furnished by the University of Missouri at Kansas City. No firm offer of this land had been made at that time, but the chancellor of the university, Dr. Randall M. Whaley, had said that he would discuss the matter with the University of Missouri Board of Curators. This tentative offer would have made the professional theatre part of a massive performing arts complex, which would include facilities for the Kansas City Lyric, a new Conservatory of Music, and other related cultural activities such as chamber music recitals.²⁹

A third tentative offer for location of the theatre came from the Bushman Investment company, which was involved in the huge Metro Plaza building development project. The boundaries of the Metro Plaza area are Brooklyn Avenue and Blue Hills Road and Fifty-ninth and Sixty-third Streets.

²⁸News item in The Kansas City Times, December 22, 1965.

²⁹Ibid.

The theatre site, if it had been approved, would have been ". . . part of a large complex consisting of a shopping center, apartments, office buildings and other facilities."³⁰

The fourth consideration for a possible site for the proposed theatre came from Avila College, which informed the Mayor's Professional Theatre Planning Committee of its willingness to donate land.³¹

Details on the other five sites under consideration were not available at that time. Some general considerations were involved in choosing the site and building the theatre, and these were reported by Fowler:

Whatever place is chosen for the new theater, it is hoped that the land will be made available without charge. The theatre structure itself, estimated to cost more than 2 million dollars, would be built through a major fund drive.³²

Hockaday at this time felt that a location should be settled upon as soon as possible because actual building plans, a fund-raising campaign and recruitment of artistic personnel would have to wait until a site for the theatre was chosen. Emmet was planning to visit New York the following month for preliminary talks with actors and directors about coming to Kansas City. For this and other reasons, Hockaday expressed

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid.

the need for an absolutely first-rate theatre building:

First, the sort of talent Mr. Emmet hopes to attract to Kansas City will not be available if we don't have a new and excellent facility in which to produce plays.

Second, it seems unlikely to us that theater of the highest quality can be produced in a second-rate plant. And third, a handsome and comfortable building will help draw and hold audiences of the size we will need to support the theater over the long run.³³

The complications involved with the U. M. K. C. theatre site are discussed in Chapter Three. Further information on the other proposed sites is not available. None were utilized.

An interesting and exciting possibility for finalizing the location appeared in the early days of May, 1966. An important tract of land in downtown Kansas City, Missouri, had become available for sale to the theatre project. Since agreement could not be reached to locate the theatre on donated land, the purchase of this tract of land became an attractive contingency for resolving the problem of location. Mayor Davis called a meeting of some sixty business and cultural leaders to discuss purchase of the land. Giles Fowler reported the details of the meeting in The Kansas City Times:

Basically, the mayor called the meeting to describe a new option to purchase a 31,000-square-foot tract fronting Twelfth Street between Central Avenue and

³³Ibid.

Broadway (land now occupied by the Folly Theater and the Arcadia Hotel).

Under the contract between the landowner, Joseph I. Lubin of New Rochelle, N. Y., and the local Repertory Theater Development organization, the site may be bought for \$472,000 as a location for a facility housing both the repertory troupe and the Lyric.³⁴

The meeting was held on May 9, 1966, and the option on the land had to be picked up by the thirty-first of the same month. One of the main reasons the Mayor had called the meeting was to try to get some definite money commitments from the people present. William N. Deramus, president of the Kansas City Southern Railroad, made the only such commitment. He offered \$75,000 as a starting point in getting the necessary funds. Hockaday, another speaker at the meeting, noted that a site at U. M. K. C. was still under consideration and that downtown business interests would have to act swiftly, if they wanted the theatre to be located in the heart of town.³⁵

A third person appearing at the meeting was Theodore Seligson, a local architect who presented a design of the proposed theatre. The theatre, which would cost about three million dollars when completed, contained an auditorium

³⁴News item in The Kansas City Times, May 10, 1966.

³⁵Ibid.

with 1,500 seats, an experimental theatre with 300 seats, and ample office, lobby and work space.³⁶

Emmet, who also spoke, said that such a theatre was necessary to achieve the quality that was desired for the proposed professional company. Renovation of the existing Folly building would not work, because it could never provide the facility that was needed. Emmet stressed the point that Kansas City would have to start on a large scale if they didn't want to wait for years for tangible results. Other cities had started from small beginnings, he pointed out, and progress had been slow; whereas at the Guthrie the beginnings had been on a grand scale, and the results had been immediate. Finally, Emmet said that Kansas City could reap enormous cash benefits from having a first-rate professional theatre there. This money would come from out-of-town visitors to the theatre and from expenditures the theatre itself would have in the community.³⁷

On May 31, 1966, The Kansas City Times announced that the option on the land had not been picked up by the Mayor's Professional Theatre Planning Committee and the Lyric. The paper quoted the Mayor as saying that the two groups were still meeting with each other in an effort to get some

³⁶Ibid. ³⁷Ibid.

action taken on the part of the businessmen to raise the necessary capital to purchase the land.³⁸ The capital was not raised.

The attempt, headed by Barton H. Emmet, to found a professional theatre in the Greater Kansas City area was officially abandoned on July 13, 1966, and The Kansas City Star duly reported the event. The announcement was made by Irvine O. Hockaday, Jr., chairman of the Mayor's Professional Theatre Planning Committee. Hockaday said that there was not sufficient interest to warrant continuation of the project and that Emmet had been ". . . freed to accept employment elsewhere."³⁹ Hockaday contended that abandonment of the project need not be the end of all efforts to establish a professional theatre in Kansas City. He observed that the Circle Theatre was planning on taking on professional status in the fall of that year, and that massive public support could make that venture succeed. Hockaday thought that the project had had some positive benefits. Through the coverage of the effort by The Kansas City Star, the public had been made aware of the need for a professional theatre in Kansas City. He urged all

³⁸News item in The Kansas City Times, May 31, 1966.

³⁹News item in The Kansas City Star, July 13, 1966.

interested people to support the local community theatres, particularly the Circle.⁴⁰

This chapter has been a chronicle of the events which occurred in connection with the Emmet-headed attempt to found a professional theatre in the Kansas City area, from its inception to the day that the project was officially abandoned. For a number of reasons, this project failed to come to fruition. These reasons are examined in depth in Chapter Three.

⁴⁰Ibid.

CHAPTER III

REASONS FOR FAILURE OF THE ATTEMPT

This chapter is an objective appraisal of the reasons why the Kansas City attempt to establish a professional theatre in 1965 and 1966 failed to come to fruition. This appraisal is based almost exclusively on information obtained from the personal interviews with Giles M. Fowler, Dr. Patricia McIlrath, Morton I. Sosland and Irvine O. Hockaday, Jr.¹ Within this framework, the heaviest reliance is placed on the interview with Hockaday. Although the other three people were members of the Mayor's Professional Theatre Planning Committee, they all agreed that Hockaday was the most informed of the four since he served as chairman. At the time of this writing, Emmet could not be located for a personal statement. This chapter is divided into four parts. The first part deals with problems in obtaining personnel. The second part examines problems in obtaining facilities. The third part focuses on problems in obtaining funds. The fourth, and final, part of this

¹Giles M. Fowler, Dr. Patricia McIlrath, Morton I. Sosland and Irvine O. Hockaday, Jr., personal interviews, Kansas City, Missouri, July first, second, eleventh, and twelfth, 1969, respectively. All subsequent references to these people in this chapter will be from these interviews.

chapter is concerned with problems in achieving good morale. Included in this part is the matter of public relations.

A. PROBLEMS IN OBTAINING PERSONNEL

Aside from sending Emmet to New York, nothing was done by the Committee to obtain personnel, either artistic or administrative, for the proposed theatre. Emmet's New York visit was made to see if people there would be interested in coming to Kansas City if (or when) a theatre could be built. The trip was not made to hire a theatre company at that time. As Hockaday stated, the philosophy of the Committee on this matter had been to get a theatre building on the way and then to go out and hire the company. This had not been Tyrone Guthrie's viewpoint when he visited Kansas City early in 1965. At that time Guthrie stated that the physical theatre needn't be of primary consideration. Guthrie further remarked that at Stratford, Ontario, a tent had been suitable for a time.² However, in Minneapolis an elaborate theatre had been built first, and this was the approach which the Kansas Citians decided to take. They found that getting a theatre building was not an easy task to accomplish.

²News item in The Kansas City Times, April 29, 1965.

B. PROBLEMS IN OBTAINING FACILITIES

Right or wrong, the Committee and Emmet had decided that the Kansas City project had to have a beautiful and elaborate theatre structure in order to produce the institution which they had envisioned. Further, this theatre was to be built before anything else was done. Such a philosophy worked in Minneapolis with the Guthrie Theatre. As Oliver Rea stated the matter in a foreword to In Search of an Audience:

. . . Contrary to the mood of the time when the theatre was conceived (1959), it was our deliberate conception to implant a full-grown "oak tree" of a theatre in Minnesota soil, the prevailing philosophy being that theatres should commence as "acorns" and gradually grow into "oak trees". . . .³

The Planning Committee for the Kansas City professional theatre felt that they too needed an "oak tree" of a theatre, so they set about trying to get one. The problems involved in this aspect of the project were manifold.

From the beginning the Committee had felt that it would be to its advantage to work with other cultural institutions in the area. Hockaday noted that one obvious advantage of mutual co-operation was that ballet-lovers

³Kay Fliehr and Bradley G. Morison, In Search of an Audience (New York: Pitman Publishing Corporation, 1968), p. xi.

would more readily contribute funds to a theatre project, if the theatre would contain facilities for ballet.

The Lyric Opera Company at that time was in a rather precarious position. They played a seven or eight week season every year. The chances of their ever getting a theatre of their own for such a short season were very slim. The Lyric had been performing in the Rockhill Theatre, and they were losing that facility. They were definitely in a position to discuss the possibility of a shared facility with the theatre group, but some unexpected complications arose. Emmet wanted a thrust stage for the proposed theatre. His reasons for wanting such a stage were sound, and the Committee agreed with him on this point. Representatives of the Lyric felt that traditional opera could not be performed on a thrust stage, that they needed a proscenium stage. Neither side wanted to compromise on this point. The possibility of building two auditoriums which would utilize the same stage space was rejected on the grounds that it would nearly double the cost of the facility.

Two difficulties prevented negotiations from ever being completed on the possibility of situating the theatre on land owned by the University of Missouri at Kansas City. A legal question arose as to whether the land could be

leased from the University for a long period of time. Hockaday, a lawyer, said that he discussed this matter with the attorneys for the University. He could receive no guarantee from them that a lease of more than twenty or twenty-five years was possible. In addition to this problem, Hockaday said that some of the Curators of the University felt that the land could very well be used for other purposes.

The building site which was considered most seriously was the one on which the Folly Theatre stood. The Mayor had held a meeting to try to arouse interest for the location of the theatre on this downtown tract of land. At this meeting William N. Deramus offered \$75,000 as a seed for the project. Deramus then left the meeting. Hockaday recalled the rest of the meeting in the following statement:

Mayor Davis then went around and called on the other people there by name and asked what they would do and the responses went something like: "Well, we get asked to give to so many things." "We're stretched right at this point." We got generally a lot of lip service on the one hand, that this was a good idea but that, of course, there were so many different things that people had to give to. What they were really saying was: we're not going to give, but please don't think that we're bad guys. Then they would give a little speech about how this was a good thing. . . .

Hockaday expanded on this point and fund-raising in general:

. . . when they had an initial commitment, like Mr. Deramus made, and when they had the specific question put to them right then from the Mayor, and they said no; I figured they would certainly say no to me if I came around in the privacy of their office where they didn't have to worry about looking bad in the press. . . .

Clearly, negotiations to utilize any of the proposed sites of land could not be completed until substantial offers of money were forthcoming from the leaders of the community. Complex problems plagued the Committee in their attempts to raise money for the proposed theatre.

C. PROBLEMS IN OBTAINING FUNDS

One of the basic inadequacies of the Mayor's Professional Theatre Planning Committee as a fund-raising force stemmed back to the formation of the Committee itself. All of the people interviewed stressed the fact that the Committee members were not the key financial leaders of the community. Fowler put the problem this way, "We weren't a social or power-elite group. We were simply a group of people interested in theatre." Hockaday, by his own admission, was chosen chairman of the Committee for lack of anyone else to assume the position.

The venture in Minneapolis had had strong financial leaders of that community on its original steering committee. Fowler characterized the Minneapolis steering committee in this way:

These were people who had their hands on the community. I mean they could squeeze and get money or else. They were real power people. We didn't have that kind of power.

Fowler further observed that Guthrie had had with him on that steering committee the headmen of a newspaper and a huge milling company in Minneapolis. In Fowler's opinion, the Kansas City Committee lacked power, because it did not have men of comparable means to the ones on the Minneapolis committee. The Kansas City Committee was aware that they could not obtain foundation support unless they first could get support from the community. Fowler commented on this problem in this way:

We obviously hoped for foundation funds, but we were aware that foundations won't kick in until you can tell there's quite a willingness on the part of the community as a whole to supply money. In other words, a foundation is not likely to support a dead dog. They're going to insist on evidence that the community can make its own way, and then they'll frequently match you.

Following this statement, Fowler repeated his belief that the weakness of the Committee lay in its lack of monied members.

Morton I. Sosland was the only member of the Kansas City Committee who could be considered a really wealthy force in the community. Sosland, concurring with Fowler's opinion about the effectiveness of the Committee, said:

I think this was undoubtedly the case. Of the members of the Committee who did the work, I guess I was the only one with the wherewithal. We had invited several monied people to join the Committee, but they didn't. So obviously that's one hundred per cent the case.

The members of the Committee interviewed agreed that one of the essential factors which harmed the effectiveness of their organization was their relationship with the Performing Arts Foundation. The Performing Arts Foundation was being formed at approximately the same time as the Mayor's Committee. The purpose of the former group was to promote unique cultural events in Kansas City, which would bring the city national recognition. They felt that this national notice would in turn cause interest in the local community. People in Kansas City would realize what Kansas City could do and would support local arts institutions. As a result, Kansas Citians would be willing to contribute money to the building of facilities. Hockaday, who was a member of the Performing Arts Foundation as well as the Mayor's Committee, said that the former group objected to some of the basic concepts of the theatre project:

The people, who really were the creative people and led the thinking of the over-all Performing Arts Foundation group, did not think that the approach of the Mayor's Repertory Committee was worthwhile. They had two basic objections, I suppose. One was that you were just creating another Guthrie Theatre much like building another Howard Johnson's. Well, I never felt as self-conscious with the idea of another Guthrie Theatre as they did, because I felt that another Guthrie Theatre would be so much superior to anything we'd ever had and that it would be nothing to be ashamed of. But they felt that Kansas City should be distinctive, that it should have its own unique enterprises and that we shouldn't go around plagiarizing or duplicating things from other cities; and that things that worked in other

cities might not work in Kansas City anyway. I think that, of course, is probably true; you don't know that because it worked in Minneapolis that it would work here. Obviously, it didn't work here. Their second objection was that you shouldn't start out building a big fancy building and have nothing to put in it. I think they would still argue that they are right.

Hockaday described the Performing Arts Foundation as ". . . a very effective and powerful fund-raising group." He said that the differences between it and the Mayor's Committee were never resolved. The Mayor's Committee wanted an elaborate theatre building, and the Performing Arts Foundation thought that the theatre group should prove its worth first. Therefore, the Mayor's Committee was never able to utilize the fund-raising power of the Performing Arts Foundation in order to achieve its goal of establishing a professional theatre in Kansas City.

One other factor affecting the fund-raising power of the Committee was Barton Emmet himself. All of the people interviewed praised Emmet's qualifications for the job, but some questioned his relationship with the Kansas City community. Since the attitudes of the four people interviewed differed, each will be discussed separately.

Fowler felt that the relationship between Emmet and the Mayor's Committee was basically sound, but that Emmet did not understand the Kansas City community or how to relate to it. Fowler thought that Emmet was viewing Kansas

City in terms of Minneapolis-St. Paul, when actually the cities were quite different. Fowler expanded on this point by listing some of the differences between the two cities:

He kept seeing Kansas City in terms of Minneapolis-St. Paul, which is a city different in many respects. They have a long tradition of major cultural institutions like the Minneapolis Philharmonic. They are the headquarters of many huge companies. They have large monied families that have a tradition of giving in large amounts; the Walker Foundation, for instance, the Walker family and many other families up there that supplied the greater part of the money from which the Guthrie Theatre was built.

A crucial point to be noted from the above statement is that Minneapolis had people who were willing to contribute large sums of money to a theatre project. Fowler thought that this was not the case in Kansas City.

Another problem which Fowler felt hurt the project ultimately was Emmet and the Committee's relationship with the Lyric Opera Company. The arguments with this group centered around Emmet's insistence that a thrust stage be built in any facility which housed both of the organizations.

Fowler observed:

. . . Guthrie had thoroughly primed him in the necessity for a thrust stage and I'm inclined to agree. But he absolutely refused to compromise with the Lyric people. . . .

In regard to a question as to whether there may have been a misunderstanding between Emmet and the community, Fowler had this to say:

There was a misunderstanding; there was distinctly a misunderstanding, but I think it was less within the Committee than in the community at large. Emmet was very abrasive. When he'd go out to make a speech, he was very hard on his audience. He didn't say this, I suppose, but it was kind of the tone of, "How dare you pretend that you're a city without a repertory," and things like that. You know how defensive Kansas Citians can be. This didn't go down well.

Finally, it was Fowler's opinion that the Committee had made a mistake in hiring Emmet for the job of executive director of the Kansas City project. Although Emmet had come to Kansas City highly recommended as an administrator by the Guthrie, the Committee could not guess in advance how well Emmet would relate to the Kansas City public. Fowler did not think that Emmet created enough interest in the project on the part of the community. Consequently, the community would not come forth with the money. For these reasons, Fowler felt that Emmet was not the right man for the job.

Dr. McIlrath agreed that Emmet apparently did not correctly judge the people in the Kansas City community.

It seemed to me that there was not enough realization on Mr. Emmet's part that there was a very, very important diplomatic project involved in this and it was not easy and it would involve getting to know Kansas Citians and getting them to understand him and what he wanted to do and getting them to believe in it. Instead there was just a little too much of a feeling there-- Mr. Emmet was a little too brusque and curt in his attitudes with the group and we got the attitude too much of, "Well, I'm waiting for someone to give me 500,000 bucks." I quote, double quote, there. This would be the kind of thing that would alienate a good many people in Kansas City.

McIlrath clarified the 'group' as meaning the community, not the Committee. She felt that the Committee worked very well with Emmet and that all of the members realized the enormity of the task before them. In regard to Emmet's misjudgement of the community, McIlrath stated:

I would say that the whole thing was that he didn't attempt in any way to woo Kansas City. Kansas City apparently can not be won, unless they first trust the person and believe in him and what he's doing. Then, and only then, will they think about money. They don't want to have the money come first. You show them what you're going to do before they will give you money.

In other words, she felt the public was not buying the idea of building a beautiful facility first and then getting the company to play in such a structure. McIlrath concurred with Fowler that part of Emmet's problem in relating to the community was that he didn't approach Kansas City on a different basis than he would have approached Minneapolis. However, McIlrath praised the talents of Emmet and said that "he should have been able to do it, but it turned out somehow to be a mistake, despite his very genial and lovable personality."

Sosland was not sure that anyone else could have done the job any better than Emmet. He said that although he had heard that Emmet alienated the community, he had observed no concrete examples of this himself. Sosland contended that the Committee worked well with Emmet, with the

possible exception of a disagreement toward the end of the project. In Sosland's opinion, some of the Committee members were not absolutely convinced that a beautiful physical facility was of prime importance to the project. Sosland elected to try to persuade Emmet that they should play a season "in a tent if necessary" to show the people of Kansas City what a professional theatre could offer them. Sosland's idea had precedent in Guthrie's statements when he visited Kansas City. Emmet rejected Sosland's suggestion. However, Sosland felt that the only reason Emmet could be considered the wrong man for the job was "that the job didn't get done."

Hockaday raised a point in regard to Emmet's function in relation to the Committee. He said that Emmet had been originally hired, not as a fund-raiser, but rather as a business manager for the project. He was to have advised on budgets and projected costs and expenses of the venture. Hockaday noted that this was not the role in which Emmet was eventually cast:

But when he got here, it became apparent that what we really needed, perhaps, was something else of some sort from either our own Committee or community or something, and kind of by default, Barton had to assume a different role than we originally hired him for.

Hockaday agreed with Fowler and McIlrath that Emmet did not approach the community in the correct way, "He kind of

talked to the community in terms of all the things that were wrong with it, the sloth, the lack of enthusiasm and civic commitment that existed." Hockaday did feel that a different approach might not have worked any better and that a different man in the same position might not have had any more success than Emmet had.

The answer to whether or not Emmet's relationship with the community was a crucial factor in causing the project to fail is not easy to resolve. Tyrone Guthrie had derided Minneapolis-St. Paul audiences in the early days of that venture for their lack of a first-class professional theatre. Although this caused some problems in public relations later on, the fact can not be ignored that the theatre was built.⁴ Consciously or not, Emmet approached the Kansas City audiences in much the same way that Guthrie approached the Minneapolis ones. However, Barton Emmet is not Tyrone Guthrie. Guthrie had a built-in reputation as a world-famous director when he arrived in Minneapolis. What worked for Guthrie would not necessarily work for Emmet; it apparently did not work.

According to those interviewed, Emmet went about the job in the best way he knew. They felt that the fault lay

⁴Ibid., pp. 4-5.

as much with the community as with Emmet that the funds were not raised to give the city a first-rate theatre. The reasons for this latter belief are examined in the next part of this chapter.

Four essential factors affected the fund-raising efforts of the Mayor's Committee. First, the Committee did not contain powerful and monied people. Second, the Committee could not get the support of the Performing Arts Foundation, which was a powerful and monied group. The Performing Arts Foundation objected to the theatre project for two main reasons. They thought that the venture was not unique to Kansas City, that it was an imitation of the Guthrie Theatre. They also thought that a physical facility should not come first, that the Committee should show the community what it could do and then raise funds for a theatre building. The third main factor affecting the fund-raising was the insistence by the Committee and Emmet that an elaborate building for the project was necessary. As the Committee members pointed out, the Performing Arts Foundation and the general public would not give financial support to the venture until they knew what the theatre group could do. Fourth, Emmet's relationship with the community and the Lyric Opera Company hurt the fund-raising effectiveness of the Committee. Portions of the community apparently were

alienated by Emmet's public statements. Disagreements over the type of staging to be used in the proposed theatre prevented the Committee from ever utilizing the fund-raising potential of the Lyric.

D. PROBLEMS IN ACHIEVING

GOOD MORALE

As stated in Chapter One, problems of morale can be divided into two specific areas: what the people in the area were willing to give up in order to get their own professional theatre, and the degree of determination to complete the project. Inherent in these questions is the matter of public relations. Preliminary to discussing these problems, it should be noted that the only money that was ever actually raised for the project was money which was used to defray initial expenditures such as travel, Emmet's salary and publicity materials for the planning stages of the project. Hockaday estimated this amount at between twenty and twenty-five thousand dollars.

Sacrifices of time and energy were much easier to obtain than financial sacrifices, in Hockaday's opinion. Committee members spent long hours studying the feasibility of the proposal. Community leaders spoke eloquently of the need for professional theatre in Kansas City, but the only

concrete pledge of money came from William N. Deramus. Even a trip to the Guthrie Theatre did not sufficiently impress the businessmen. Fowler described the aftermath of the trip:

Everyone seemed very excited, but when it came right down to brass tacks, everybody would say hesitantly, "I'll give five thousand dollars, if he gives five thousand dollars." Five thousand dollars is nothing anyway and of course what we lacked essentially was the enormously powerful, enormously rich man or family who would come forth and say, "Alright, I'll give a million dollars, if the community can match it by half." There just wasn't this central force.

At one time the Committee attempted to raise one million dollars by getting ten \$100,000 contributions. Sosland said that a list was made of the most prominent and wealthy people in Kansas City. The first few people on the list (names withheld by request) were called and asked to pledge \$100,000 each. They all turned down the request and the calling was abandoned. Sosland said that if they could have gotten two or three pledges, the others would have been easier to get. If they could have said that X had contributed, the other people would have felt obligated to do the same.

Right or wrong, the Committee wanted to raise a large sum of money to build the theatre facility. If they had tried for smaller sums of money to produce plays in a modest facility for awhile, the project might have succeeded. As

stated previously, the community did not want to contribute money to a building, if they did not know what the building would house. No attempts were made to raise money for anything but the facility itself. The following statements on fund-raising in Kansas City and the temper of the community are based on unsuccessful attempts to raise money for the building.

Fowler attributed this lack of action on the part of the community leaders to a basic cultural lethargy in the area. He said that this lethargy resulted in an essential unwillingness on the part of the community as a whole to support the arts.

Hockaday saw the basic problem as lack of interest in the project on the part of the community. Related to this lack of interest was the problem of raising the money for the building. Without sufficient interest, sufficient funds would not be forthcoming. Morton Sosland agreed that the community was not willing to make sufficient monetary sacrifices in order to get "the project off the ground." Sosland succinctly stated the core problem with the community when he said, "the thing that was lacking as is so often lacking in Kansas City, was the inability to come through with the money. Period. Period." The public then wasn't willing to make sufficient monetary contributions in order

to get the theatre built.

Other reasons for the lack of public support of the venture can be traced to the problem of public relations. Emmet may have alienated some key elements in the community through his public statements to them. Two objectives of the Committee and Emmet alienated support from other organizations in the city. First, the insistence on a physical facility was a reason why the Performing Arts Foundation withheld its support. Second, the insistence on a thrust stage for the proposed theatre alienated the support of the Lyric Opera Company.

Hockaday felt that the degree of determination to complete the project declined as the Committee continued to run into problems, "so that I think toward the last there was a rather complete sense of futility on behalf of the members of the Committee." Sosland, when asked if the degree of determination to complete the project had been high, also replied negatively:

I would say no. There was on the part of a few of us to get it completed. I think what it really got down to was that there were two separate things: did we want the theatre? Yes, and there was high morale for this. Did we want to work hard to raise the money or could we raise the money? No. The morale was high for the theatre, but not high for the fund-raising.

This chapter has been concerned with an analysis of the reasons why the Kansas City project to establish a

professional theatre in 1965 and 1966 failed to come to fruition. Interpretation of the data presented was based on the insights of the four people interviewed and the general theatre management concepts as outlined in Chapter One. A summary of this interpretation is contained in the concluding chapter of this thesis.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

After seventeen months, February, 1965 to July, 1966, of intensive study of a proposal to establish a full-blown Guthrie-type professional theatre, the theatrical situation in Kansas City had changed little. The Circle was still indicating its desire to become a professional theatre. Non-professional community theatres in the area were operating as usual. Why had the attempt to found a first-rate professional theatre in the Kansas City area failed? No single factor by itself caused the abandonment of the project. This chapter is a summary of the crucial factors which prevented the project from coming to fruition.

The first, and most important, factor which caused the project to fail was the insistence by the Committee and Emmet that a first-rate theatre facility was necessary for the project. No compromises were made on this point, because the Committee from the beginning had wanted a theatre building first and a professional company second. In any case, they did not want to work from existing theatrical institutions in the city. They wanted a full-blown professional theatre in the Tyrone Guthrie Theatre manner. When funds could not be raised to build such a theatre, the

project was abandoned. Conversely, if the funds could have been raised for the building, the project would probably not have been abandoned. The following factors all relate to the attempts to raise those funds.

A second factor which caused the project to fail was the lack of co-operation with the Lyric Opera Company. The disagreements over the type of staging to be used in the proposed theatre should have been resolved so that the two groups could have united their fund-raising potential.

Differences with the Performing Arts Foundation were another factor which hurt the over-all effort. The inflexibility of the Mayor's Committee on the point of starting with a Guthrie-type building caused the Performing Arts Foundation to withhold its support from the theatre project. If the Committee had been willing to try something else, the Performing Arts Foundation might have been willing to lend its support to the project.

The lack of socially and financially powerful people on the Mayor's Professional Theatre Planning Committee was a detriment to its fund-raising potential. This was a fourth factor which damaged the effectiveness of the project.

The fifth detrimental factor was Emmet's relationship with the community. Whether intentional or not, key

financial elements in the community apparently received an unfavorable impression of Emmet, and hence, of the project itself.

The sixth, and final, factor which caused the professional theatre project to fail is based at least partially on the other five factors. The inability to convince the public that they needed a professional theatre at that time was caused not only by the above factors, but also by a basic deficiency on the part of the community itself. The community was basically lethargic in regard to support of the arts. Therefore, it would not lend its assistance to the theatre project.

By attempting to establish a full-blown, "oak-tree" of a theatre, Kansas City was attempting to match the success which Minneapolis had had with the Guthrie Theatre. However, the Guthrie Theatre is the exception, not the rule, in the country. The usual method for establishing a professional theatre is to start small and build community support slowly. The Mayor's Professional Theatre Committee was ill-advised to be so one-minded in their objectives. Perhaps a different approach might have resulted in the founding of a professional theatre to serve the metropolitan area of Kansas City.

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