



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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“The bodies of deceased convicts and unidentified vagrants often were used for such lessons...”

-Description of photograph of “Dr. Richard Whitehead with his first-year anatomy class and an assistant in woods near the area now occupied by Wilson Library” (1890)

I decided that as long as I was in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, I might as well do some research on my mother, who graduated from the university there (UNC) in 1941. Fortunately, she was in the dramatic art department, where it is commonplace to have at least some photographs of the students. It didn't take long to discover the Louis Round Wilson Library on the campus, which opened in 1929. According to their blue-and-white flyer (those are the UNC colors), this library “serves as the main special collections library and the home for several other collections and services.” The two collections where I found pertinent information were the North Carolina Collection and the Imaging and Photographic Services.

I started with the North Carolina Collection. This collection is actually the “largest and most comprehensive collection of traditional library materials related to a single state” (also

from their flyer). The Reading Room for the library users is huge, with high ceilings and lots of long shiny dark wooden tables. I told the kind, enthusiastic and friendly librarian what I was looking for and he explained my options: Yearbooks out on the shelves and scrapbooks from the Carolina Playmakers in the closed stacks. I found one photograph of my mother in the 1939-1940 yearbook, and then turned to the scrapbook.

This turned out to be a fascinating compilation of playbills, photographs, ticket stubs, local newspaper articles and small booklets about theatre events. The book was at least 6 inches thick and it measured about 9 by 12 inches – and it was only one of the many scrapbooks on this subject. The items had originally been glued to the pages, but many were loose, because the glue had long since lost its stick. I turned page after page, looking for any mention of my

mother, and as I did, I could see her progression from assistant technical support to props master to stage manager to finally what looked like a lead part. The first photograph of her was amazing – there she was, looking so young and so familiar. By the time I had finished, I had the titles and dates of four plays she acted in. After photocopying all the handbills with her name, I then walked down one flight to my next stop.

The man who staffed the Imaging and Photographic Services was extremely helpful as well. I gave him the list I had compiled and after a few minutes, he called me into the back. He handed me four manila envelopes and a pair of white cotton gloves, explaining that I would be handling original prints. I went through each envelope, pulled out the ones of my mother, filled out a form and in a few weeks I will

receive a CD with the images. Now that is a wonderful use of technology.

In addition to the information about my mother, I learned a couple of other interesting facts. First, Thomas Wolfe was at UNC from 1916-1920, and there is actually a Thomas Wolfe Room adjacent to the Reading Room, with a setting that is based architecturally on his boyhood home in Asheville, North Carolina. I also discovered why my mother didn't go to UNC until she was a junior – it turns out that until 1963 the college didn't allow women to attend as freshmen. Now what is the logic of that?