

## Updates from the August Wilson Archive at Pitt Library System

By Dr. Leah Mickens and William Daw

*August Wilson Project Archivist & Curator of the Curtis Theatre Collection*

### Abstract

Dr. Leah Mickens and William Daw provide an update on the August Wilson Archive acquired by the University of Pittsburgh Library in the fall of 2020.

### Keywords

*Updates, August Wilson Archive, Grant, Plans*

The University of Pittsburgh Library System staff was happy to share information with the editors of the August Wilson Journal regarding the acquisition of the August Wilson Archive in the Spring 2021 issue. Since that time, staff within Archives & Special Collections (A&SC) have made considerable progress on the processing of the over 450 boxes in the archive and we wanted to give further updates and share some announcements regarding next year.

Dr. Leah Mickens was hired in March 2021 as the August Wilson Processing Archivist. She has joined our staff after earning her MLIS from the University of South Carolina, Columbia and her PhD from Boston University. Dr. Mickens has been tasked with the preliminary organization and description of the paper-based materials in the collection. Dr. Mickens spent several months engaged in an examination of the boxes containing the unprocessed materials in the August Wilson Archive.

After this initial review, Dr. Mickens began working with the materials associated with Wilson's American Century Cycle plays, starting with *Seven Guitars*. The processing and arrangement of this segment of the archive has been the main priority for our staff in order to make this material available to researchers as soon as the collection opens. This material includes initial drafts, rehearsal reports, production notes, costume and set art, reviews, contracts, programs and multiple drafts of the script for each of the ten plays. Other items of interest present in the collection include artwork drawn by Wilson himself, artifacts, awards, born-digital documents, and a small number of stage props. Work on *Jitney*, the final American Century Cycle play to be processed, was completed in early August 2022.

One of the interesting finds in the August Wilson Archive has been boxes full of notebooks (over 700!) containing to-do lists, dialogue ideas, plot outlines, poetry, brainstorming, and personal reflections. Most of the notebooks are yellow legal pads, but there are also binders, spiral notebooks, notes written on scrap paper, and hotel writing pads. Since the quality of the paper contained in many of these notebooks is quite poor, they pose a long-term preservation problem. We are in the process of creating high-quality facsimiles which will be made available to researchers so they can examine the contents without damaging the original artifacts.

In addition to Dr. Mickens and other full-time A&SC staff members, there have also been several student employees and interns who have assisted with the project. Among other tasks, these students have arranged Wilson's books, music, and audio-visual collections, sorting newspaper and magazine clippings, and reviewing born-digital files.

### **Hillman Foundation Grant**

In August 2022, the University of Pittsburgh Library System received a [\\$1 million grant from the Henry L. Hillman Foundation](#) to not only support the work to prepare the archive to be open to the public, but to facilitate engaging the wider Pittsburgh community with the materials contained in the archive. Our plans involve inviting high school students, teachers, artists, and community residents to interact with the August Wilson Archive to produce new and creative works, such as exhibits, or to embed the archive in their teaching or artistic outlets. This funding supports hiring additional full-time staff to coordinate outreach efforts with the August Wilson Archive. We welcome Ms. Dial Thomas as the inaugural August Wilson Outreach and Engagement Curator.

### **Plans for 2023**

We are excited to share the news that the archive will become open for research in January 2023. Further, we are planning to celebrate the opening of the August Wilson Archive in Hillman Library on the University of Pittsburgh campus on Friday, March 3, 2023. This event will be free and open to the public. Leading up to the March 3rd celebration will be a week of both in-person and virtual programming co-presented by the University of Pittsburgh Library System, other Pitt academic departments, and several local organizations. The timing of these events will also overlap with a production of *Seven Guitars* by University of Pittsburgh Stages on the Pitt campus and the bi-annual colloquium of the August Wilson Society, which will be located at the August Wilson African American Cultural Center in downtown Pittsburgh. To learn more or register for these events, [please watch our August Wilson Archive website for more information](#).

## Author Bios

Dr. Leah Mickens relocated to Pittsburgh from her hometown of Atlanta, Georgia. Dr. Mickens has a Ph.D. in religious studies from Boston University, a master's in library and information science with a concentration in archival studies from the University of South Carolina, a master's in digital media from the Georgia Institute of Technology, and an undergraduate degree in international studies from Oglethorpe University.

William Daw manages the performing arts collections within the University of Pittsburgh Library System's Archives & Special Collections. He has both an undergraduate degree in history and a master's in library and information science with a concentration in archival studies from the University of Pittsburgh.



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