



# PRESERVING ST. LOUIS

A Study of the National Building Arts Center

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**Preserving St. Louis: A Study of the National Building Arts Center**

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## **Abstract**

Over the past century, the built environment of St. Louis, Missouri has changed drastically. The destruction of the riverfront warehouse district, the urban renewal of the 1960s and the construction of the Gateway Mall and Arch have all contributed to the ever-changing landscape of the city. The architectural remains of these events have ended up either destroyed, repurposed or recovered. Created in 2007, the National Building Arts Center (NBAC) holds a large collection of building arts artifacts from St. Louis, as well as from around the United States. The founder and owner of NBAC, Larry Giles, began recovering portions of buildings set for demolition in the St. Louis area nearly 30 years prior to the Center's conception. NBAC is a research center, a library, a repository and has the makings of a building arts museum. The mission of NBAC revolves around a desire to educate the public on all aspects of the building arts, from design to fabrication.

This research project examines the National Building Arts Center on cultural, community, financial and organizational levels. Literary research involving the history of American architecture, St. Louis architecture and the National Building Arts Center provide the background for this research. Interviews, financial statements and past experience provide context, motivation and multiple perspectives throughout this study. The methods used for this research project focus on the strengths, weaknesses and challenges of the National Building Arts Center in order to inform possible opportunities for continued organizational growth and community outreach.

## **Section I: Introduction to Research**

Winston Churchill summed up the importance of architecture in our lives when he said, “We shape our buildings, and thereafter they shape us.” This exchange of influences takes place in the process by which buildings have always silently told a story to people from other places, and in other times. For while buildings must serve useful purposes, they must also be considered as symbols – symbols of the values important to their communities at the time they were built.<sup>1</sup>

Since the United States Department of the Interior passed the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the National Park Service has been committed to identifying and preserving districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects significant in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture (40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, National Historic Preservation Act, 2006). While historic preservationists have worked to combat the disappearing landscape of the built environment, the evolution of architectural styles continue to result in the demolition and destruction of the built environment. This project addresses the life cycle of the St. Louis built environment over the past century in the context of the National Building Arts Center. The Center’s practice of preserving architectural artifacts through salvation, storage, research and exhibition provide this project with a singular model for both the fields of arts administration and historic preservation. This project focuses on the strengths, weaknesses, challenges and opportunities of the center while examining its long-term and short-term goals.

### **Introduction to the National Building Arts Center**

During the summer of 2015, I was an intern at the National Building Arts Center (NBAC). The Center, once in the heart of the city of St. Louis, now takes up residency across the river in Sauget, Illinois. The old Sterling Steel Foundry, consisting of 14 buildings, holds NBAC’s

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<sup>1</sup> McCue, 1964, p. 5. Taken from a letter from George E. Kassabaum, President of the St. Louis Chapter of the American Institute of Architects in [The Building Art in St. Louis: Two Centuries](#).

immense collection of architectural artifacts, books, periodicals, papers and photographs. In its mission, NBAC “strives to use its massive collection to educate the public on all aspects of the building arts from design to fabrication” (“Mission and Board of Directors”, 2014). For now, the center operates as a study center and repository of sorts, open to the public by way of scheduled tours. One of the long-term goals of NBAC includes the creation of a building arts museum. This research project will address the challenges in achieving this goal and presents possible opportunities to overcome them.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the weaknesses of the National Building Arts Center and how can its strengths combat the challenges it faces?
2. What are some possible solutions or suggestions to keep the Center moving forward with its mission and vision?

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study was to examine the National Building Arts Center on cultural, community, financial and organizational levels. This project includes an evaluation of the challenges that the National Building Arts Center faces in regards to funding, community outreach, programming and resources. It is also meant to explore the Center and its role as a cultural institution representing the built environment of the city of St. Louis, Missouri. In order to address each of these topics, I briefly examine the background of American architecture, specifically looking at the architectural development of St. Louis over the past century. I will discuss the city’s urban development during the 1960s and the destruction of 37 blocks of historic architecture to make way for the Gateway Arch. I will then use scholarly literature and

interviews to investigate my two research questions. These references are used to address topics of architectural museums, historic preservation, importance of space and place and possible solutions to the challenges that the Center currently faces. Finally, I will present practical approaches to address what increased funding and support might do for the Center.

## **Research Methodology**

Qualitative research methods are used throughout this research project to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the National Building Arts Center. Background literature, interviews and past experience, enabled me to create a research project revolving around an organization with limited resources. The background literature for this project provides a brief history of American architecture and the St. Louis built environment. This background material is relevant to the mission of the National Building Arts Center. This research includes the cycles of the built environment from conception, to construction, idolization, deterioration and finally demolition. Additional resources address the impact that social and political climates have on the built environment. The use of this literature allowed me to propose possible programming opportunities for the National Building Arts Center through the eyes of an arts administrator.

The historical background of the St. Louis built environment creates the framework for this research project and the mission of the National Building Arts Center. The remnants of the destruction and deterioration of the cityscape make up a large portion of the Center's collection. Previous research done on the National Building Arts Center is sparse, but I was able to collect enough information to create a well-rounded study of the organization. I utilized newspaper and magazine articles from the St. Louis area to enhance the narrative of the organization. The Center's media archive provided me with the majority of these resources.



Interviews with three of the Center's constituents also informed this research project. The participant pool included a volunteer, a board member and the owner. Because of the physical distance that separated the interviewees with myself, interviews were conducted over the course of a month by telephone and Skype. Questions and answers were recorded and later transcribed. Handwritten notes were also taken in order to emphasize critical points about the case study. I interviewed three different people in three different positions in order to form a more complete picture of what the organization does and what it wants to do. I asked each participant variations of the same ten questions. This resulted in similar expressions of concern for St. Louis architecture and funding for the National Building Arts Center. Interview transcriptions in their entirety are not provided in this paper. Instead, specific quotations and overarching themes presented in the interviews are used to emphasize and answer my main research questions.

Financial statements from the St. Louis Architecture Foundation, the financial arm of the National Building Arts Center, also inform this research project. The review of 990 tax statements provide a larger, unbiased view of the organization, as well as provide insight into the current financial status of the National Building Arts Center. These statements provide valuable insight into the programming, fundraising and promotion done by the organization between the years of 2010 and 2014. I also analyzed revenue sources, expenses, assets and liabilities over this five year period. The review of these documents aided in further addressing the strengths, weaknesses, challenges and opportunities of the organization in an analytical format.

The methods that I used for my research allowed me to come to conclusions by way of possible opportunities for the National Building Arts Center to extend their reach in the community and address financial issues. These opportunities, address the five major weaknesses of the organization and include suggestions presented by project participants and myself.

## **Research Approach**

The idea for this research topic came from an internship that I had at the National Building Arts Center during the summer of 2015. During my time at the Center, I experienced firsthand the challenges and successes of a small nonprofit. After spending the summer helping create what will one day be one of the largest, comprehensive digital archives focused on the building arts, I could not help but notice the lack of community awareness, organizational support and financial funding surrounding NBAC. Once I began my research project, I quickly realized that the resources on the topic of architectural exhibitions are limited in comparison to museums centered on art, science and history. Studies on building arts museums seemed all but nonexistent. In light of this research challenge, I decided to conduct a research project that included the examination of St. Louis architecture and the National Building Arts Center.

## **Conceptual Framework**

There are three main sections to this research paper. The first, background information containing a brief history of American and St. Louis architecture alongside materials covering the National Building Arts Center. Second, a case study of the National Building Arts Center. This section will contain an introduction to the center, interviews with project participants and an examination of its strengths, weaknesses, challenges and opportunities. The third and final section of this paper will suggest three practical approaches to addressing the needs and challenges of the National Building Arts Center. The purpose of these three sections is to create a framework that acknowledges the built environment of St. Louis as disappearing, introduces an outlet to fill this gap and provides suggestions for successful exhibition of architecture.

The history of American and St. Louis architecture will be explored through summarized background research. Author Mark Gelernter writes of the rise and fall of many architectural styles in his book *A History of American Architecture* (1999). Gelernter addresses the modernist, traditional, and postmodern movements in chronological order, examining their ties to American cultural beliefs and societal norms during different time periods. This project explores the timeline of St. Louis architecture through a number of books and scholarly articles, specifically looking at the works of George McCue and Tracy Campbell.

To put the history of St. Louis architecture into a context relevant to the goals of architectural preservation, an organization dedicated to achieving those goals is key. The National Building Arts Center will serve as a touchpoint for building arts collections, storage and exhibition. The Center will also be discussed in its capacity as a library and research center. The third and final section includes potential for possibilities for community support and engagement.

### **Key Words and Phrases**

*Architecture*: “The art or science of designing and creating buildings; a method or style of building” (Merriam-Webster.com, 2015).

*Building Arts*: According to the American College of the Building Arts, the professions under the category of the building arts include stone carving, cutting, conservation, and installation, technical and artistic finish carpentry, historic masonry for brick and stone repair, restoration, and preservation, architectural and decorative blacksmithing, ornamental plastering, repair, and restoration, timber wood framing, design, and assembly (American College of the Building Arts, 2016).

*Culture*: “The customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group; also: the characteristic features of everyday existence (as diversions or a way of life) shared by people in a place or time” (Merriam-Webster.com, 2015).

*Historic Preservation*: “‘Preservation’ or ‘historic preservation’ includes identification, evaluation, recordation, documentation, curation, acquisition, protection, management, rehabilitation, restoration, stabilization, maintenance, research, interpretation, conservation, and education and training regarding the foregoing activities, or any combination of the foregoing activities” (National Historic Preservation Act, 2006).

*Museum*: In my own interpretation, a museum is a collection of thoughts, ideas, artifacts, or articles that are showcased to the public in a purposeful way, whether the intent be social, educational, historical, political or functional.

*National Building Arts Center*: “The National Building Arts Center is a unique, emergent study center housing the nation’s largest and most diversified collection of building artifacts, supported with a research library offering broad holdings in architecture and allied arts. Our collection represents the single largest effort toward understanding the American built environment and the historical process of its creation. The Center strives to use its massive collections to educate the public on all aspects of the building arts from design to fabrication” (“Mission and Board of Directors”, 2014).

*Repository*: “A place, building, or receptacle where things are or may be stored.” (Merriam-Webster.com, 2015).

*Research Center:* The National Building Arts Center functions as a research center for scholars and researchers interested in the building arts. In the past, the center has provided photographic material and written transcriptions that have been included in published material.

*Space and Place:* For the uses of this research and in my own definition, space and place will be used to define buildings and the cities that they reside in. Space is tangible, referring to the actual room, building or area a person is standing in at any given time. Place is intangible, speaking more to the meaning and identity a community creates around architecture.

*St. Louis Architecture Foundation:* The financial arm of the National Building Arts Center.

*Sterling Steel Casting Company Foundry:* The campus of the National Building Arts Center has taken the place of an old steel casting foundry. The foundry consists of 15 acres of land and 14 historic casting, pattern storage and office buildings (“Mission and Board of Directors”, 2014). The research center and library take up the main office building, while most of the architectural artifacts are stored in former manufacturing buildings.

## **Introduction to Project Participants**

*Bridget Hall:* I am a second year Masters Candidate in Arts Management with a focus in Museum Studies at the University of Oregon. I have a Bachelor of Arts in International Studies from Loras College, where I also minored in History and Media Studies. My background is in Portuguese and African studies, specifically referencing colonial monuments in a post-imperial world.

*Larry Giles:* Larry Giles is the owner, founder and President of the Board at the National Building Arts Center. Giles began his business in 1972 under the name of Soulard Resources with the mission to stabilize 300 buildings in the Soulard neighborhood in St. Louis. From there,

Giles' vision evolved into the St. Louis Architectural Art Company, a building restoration firm that did architectural recovery and materials conservation (Vespereny, 2014). In 2002, Giles created the St. Louis Architecture Foundation, the financial arm of what today is the National Building Arts Center (2007).

*Eric Sandweiss:* Eric Sandweiss is a member of the board of directors at the National Building Arts Center. Outside of his involvement with NBAC, Sandweiss is a professor and the Carmony Chair in the Department of History at Indiana University Bloomington, editor of the *Indiana Magazine of History* and adjunct professor in the Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology.

*Sarah Weeks:* Sarah Weeks is a volunteer at the National Building Arts Center. She works as a librarian at the Center, as well as an intern coordinator. Weeks has a Bachelor of Arts in English from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and a Masters of Library Science from the University of Washington. Weeks is employed as a librarian outside of her work at the Center.

## **Section 2: Background Research and Scholarly Literature**

### **2.1 General Overview of American Architecture**

Mark Gelernter's book *A History of American Architecture* (1999) documents the beginning of the building arts from the colonial period to present day. Gelernter's work includes the evolution of architectural materials and styles. He highlights the loss of traditional architecture due to ideas of progress, and how certain styles have become adaptations or shadows of what once was.

Gelernter points out that these mutations of previous architectural styles are reflective not only of architects, designers and builders, but a wider spread social change that happens in society over time. Gelernter's work describes architectural prototypes from civilizations past, as important because they become "subsequent building in the Old and New Worlds" (Gelernter, 1999, p. 4).

The relevancy of this book lies in the importance that is placed on societal influence in architecture. Architecture and the building arts are a major factor in determining the history of how humans have lived. The built environment is not only able to teach us about technological advances in society, but patterns of adaptation and attitude as well.

Zaha Hadid focuses on societal influence by way of analyzing the symbolism of status and class in her chapter entitled *Another Beginning* in the book The End of Architecture? (1993). “The opposite is the case: democratization and, through it, the conscious and rational organization of society did not go deep enough, so that the people’s palaces turned into ghettos and modern architecture became unwittingly their unlucky symbol” (Hadid, 1993, p. 27). In terms of the political and social landscape of St. Louis during the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the public sector experienced a period of urban revitalization that resulted in unkempt, cheap housing for low income families and individuals.

## **2.2 History of St. Louis Architecture**

Social and political attitudes have been two of the main influences in the evolution of the St. Louis landscape. George McCue has written on the topic of St. Louis architecture, documenting the city from its conception to its exchange during the Louisiana Purchase and some of the cultural and structural changes that have happened since then. McCue’s book The Building Art in St. Louis: Two Centuries (1964) is reflective of the city’s constant transitions. The architecture that brought St. Louis into the industrial age has all but disappeared due in part to the fire of 1849 (O’Neil, 2010) as well as the riverfront demolition of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (McCue, 1964, p. 12). The loss of these parts of the city wiped out much of the cultural influences of the large immigrant population of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Portions of buildings that held names like Ambassador,

Century, Rosenheim and Wainwright now sit crated up and stacked neatly in the old warehouses of the National Building Arts Center.

In one of his later works, McCue and co-author Frank Peters discuss the urban decay and failed development of low income housing in the 1960s in their book *A Guide to the Architecture of St. Louis* (1989). The irony of this book is in the optimism of the writing and views on the future of St. Louis architecture. The 37 blocks of the historic riverfront warehouse district, revered for its cultural importance, fell just as hard and just as fast as the cheap and easy products of the St. Louis urban renewal projects. This trend of disregard for historic architecture says little for value the city places on its built environment.

In contrast to the optimistic views of McCue and those he collaborated with, Tracy Campbell addresses the city's historic disregard for preserving St. Louis architecture. In her book *The Gateway Arch: A Biography* (2013), Campbell examines the clearing of the riverfront district during the 1930s, and references a survey of the area done by the Chamber of Commerce at that time. "An engineering survey concluded that only 2 percent of the thirty-seven blocks slated for renovation could be labeled as 'vacant,' while 44 percent was composed of 'light industry.'" Businesses in the area included printing companies, fur and wool traders, seed and feed distributors, and some wholesale grocers" (Campbell, 2013, p. 35). With the upheaval of many citizens from their homes and jobs, and the demolition of the nearly 40 city blocks, the downtown upscale housing of the 19th century turned into 20th century slum living that was briefly discussed in McCue's writing. The response to this urgent social need was the disastrous urban renewal of the 1960s. This contrasts with the symbolic pride of the Gateway Arch, which was built during the same decade.



The St. Louis Dispatch published an article in 2010 entitled “A Look Back: Demolition Cleared Way for Gateway Arch”, which addressed the controversy behind the city’s monuments as discussed in Campbell’s book. “Within three years, it would be almost empty ground — 39 blocks of smoothed-over rubble, the architectural gems obliterated with the tumble-down dumps. Across 91 acres that was home to early St. Louis, the only buildings spared were the Old Courthouse, the Old Cathedral and fur trader Manuel Lisa's 1818-vintage Rock House” (O’Neil, 2010). O’Neil then goes on to reveal that two of the few remaining buildings left over from the St. Louis fire of 1849 were swept away as well (O’Neil, 2010). The question fundamental to this research project is ‘what happened to it all’? “Wrecking crews stored away some of the iron storefronts and ornate windows from old buildings. A few artifacts made it to the Old Courthouse and museums elsewhere, but much of it went into the trash” (O’Neil, 2010).

### **2.3 Architecture and its Role in Society**

To help understand why there seems to be such a disregard for preserving St. Louis’ historic architecture, it is useful to consider the role of architecture in society. For the past 40 years that is what founder and owner of the National Building Arts Center, Larry Giles, has done. Giles sees the building arts as a trade, a craft and a tradition, and his frustration with the destruction of the St. Louis built environment is no secret. He calls St. Louis the “toothless tiger” of saving buildings, a city with a number of people who blog about preservation, but sees the failure in civic leadership to do anything about it. As has been proven in the case of St. Louis, accomplishing a widespread value of historic preservation is not an easy task, and thus finding a way to exhibit architectural artifacts even more challenging.

In the 2005 Tech Section of the magazine *Diverse: Issues in American Education*, it was announced that the American College of the Building Arts had finally opened in Charleston,

South Carolina. The college is the only higher education institution in the United States dedicated solely to the building arts. It offers general liberal arts studies and six majors focused on the building arts to choose from. “The school will teach traditional building techniques that have almost vanished in America. The college will train students in masonry, finish carpentry, plasterwork, timber framing and stone carving” (2005). A school dedicated to the building arts is monumental step in the way of educating the public about architectural value, and it creates a more open and accessible atmosphere for outsiders to ask questions. For building arts museums, the study of architecture alone may seem isolating because of its clear focus on development and progress. The study of historic preservation, while more in line with the values and objectives of a building arts museum, strays away from housing pieces of demolished or torn down cityscapes and focuses more on recreating, revitalizing and preserving what still is. Preventative measures in terms of slowing down the demolition of historically and architecturally important buildings could be part of the goals of a building arts museum, but a section to display and educate the public with the materials that they have might also be incorporated.

In Matthias Albreicht Amann’s chapter *Curating for Dead Architecture* in the book Curating Architecture and the City (2009), he points out that if we are to say that architecture has a life and is treated as if it has something reflective of living things, that architecture too must die at some point (Amann, 2009, p. 103). The death of architecture can be interpreted in two ways, the first being as Amann uses it in terms of abandonment, or the second most relevant to the mission and goal of the National Building Arts Center, the demolition and substitution of new buildings in place of the old. Death of a building does not need to bring about death of memory, and therefore the necessity in preserving the pieces of deceased architecture becomes imperative. In this chapter, Amann also expresses his belief that a refurbished building cannot maintain its

personality. “Such a refurbished building has been stripped of its personality, and no longer radiates what once animated it” (Amann, 2009, p. 103). Amann then later adds that “demolition is no solution” (Amann, 2009, p. 106). The belief that reused buildings or building materials cannot reanimate a space or place, present challenges for those that salvage pieces of demolished buildings such as Giles does. While the large collection of the National Building Arts Center is one of its strengths, the challenge lies in the idea that architecture lacks meaning after its destruction. The notion that architecture ends with wrecking crews can be countered with the idea that instead, architecture ends with the death of memory. The National Building Arts Center can be used as an example of this. The Center has produced a catalog of its collection, as well as an inventory of pieces meant for purchase and reuse. Buildings could be reanimated by reuse of materials salvaged from a demolished building. They might also be used in an educational format to inform and inspire future architects, historians, researchers and museum professionals. Preservation or conservation towards a certain piece of art, artifact or in this case, buildings, rely on a certain attitude needed towards history and heritage in contest with monetary value. This is the point that author Gerald Adler makes in his chapter *Curating the social, curating the architectural* in Curating Architecture and the City. While he begins his chapter with the idea that “built works of architecture form vital aspects of our cultural heritage” (Adler, 2009, p. 167), he addresses the importance of and complexity of preservation. “A building, of course, has an inherent monetary value, in addition to its embedded energy. If, however, this is less than the redevelopment value of its site, then a dearth of any inherent social, historical or architectural qualities will render it ripe for demolition” (Adler, 2009, p. 167). The battle between cultural importance and monetary gain prevent access to resources necessary to save buildings. While

demolition increases the growth of collections for organizations like NBAC, it also strips away part of the cultural narrative of the city that the organization is trying to preserve.

## **2.4 Literature on the National Building Arts Center**

The synopsis of the history of architecture, the timeline of St. Louis architecture and the cultural and historical meanings of buildings all aid in the explanation of why a fully functional building arts museum, like what the National Buildings Arts Center one day hopes to be, matters. The brief history of the built environment of St. Louis is also meant to show the struggles in the way of achieving this goal. What this section hopes to do is act as an introduction to the National Building Arts Center and how it might become a building arts museum.

Amy K. Levin's book Defining Memory (2007) is a collection of essays brought together on the topic of local museums. In the first chapter of her book, *Why Local Museums Matter*, Levin addresses identity in terms of community. The St. Louis façade is ever changing while the population remains stagnant. "The plethora of local museums is also attributable to what we do not have" (Levin, 2007, p. 9). The collections at the National Building Arts center are representative of a lost past, as well as the characteristics of a changing population. The work that a building arts museum might do in St. Louis involves educational, artistic, political and historical factors that otherwise might be underrepresented if the efforts of the museum were to be cut short because of funding or relevancy problems.

Levin's book also introduces the reader to the work of Eric Sandweiss, a professor at Indiana University and member of the board of directors at the National Building Arts Center. I had opportunity to speak with Dr. Sandweiss for this project, and excerpts from that interview will be referenced later in this paper. For now, I would like to take a look at the chapter he wrote in

Defining Memory (2007) entitled *Cities, Museum, and City Museums*. In this chapter, Sandweiss compares the National Building Arts Center to the City Museum in St. Louis. Sandweiss takes an in-depth look at St. Louis architecture and the mission of NBAC (then called The National Architectural Arts Center). Sandweiss introduces Giles as an architectural recovery specialist who, over the last 40 years, has contracted with “firms already engaged in the process of demolishing local buildings,” securing for himself a collection of significant pieces including cast iron storefronts and pieces of stellar skyscrapers (Sandweiss, 2007, p. 221). As I learned during my time interning at the National Building Arts Center, and as Sandweiss notes in his chapter, Giles has meticulously documented every building that he has ever recovered pieces from (Sandweiss, 2007, p. 221). This documentation ranges from applications, to contracts, newspaper articles and an enormous collection of 35 mm film strips. Giles’ recovery and collection habits are what led him to create the nonprofit organization that is today called the National Building Arts Center. Sandweiss’ chapter documents how Giles’ warehouse migrated from the Soulard neighborhood in the heart of St. Louis, to across the river into the industrial village of Sauget, Illinois. Giles’ personal view of his business endeavor is also made clear in this chapter by comparing the rationales behind NBAC and Bob Cassilly’s City Museum. “Cassilly looks out at the detritus of St. Louis’s late twentieth-century urban decay and sees toys for his sandbox; Giles sees sacraments awaiting their shrine” (Sandweiss, 2007, p. 222).

### **Section 3: Case Study: The National Building Arts Center**

I first became acquainted with the National Building Arts Center during the winter term of 2015 at the University of Oregon. I was searching the St. Louis area for an internship. I wanted to work for a unique organization, passionate about what they do, with a strong desire to grow. My internship at the Center consisted primarily of archival work. I digitized a large collection of 35

mm negatives that owner and founder Larry Giles had compiled over the years. These negatives documented the many recovery projects that Giles had undertaken over the past 40 years. This internship also allowed me the opportunity to work on a project that involved transcribing, scanning and organizing a collection of letters from the W.H. Junge collection. Junge's correspondence during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries has proven to be important in shedding new light on leaders of the American terra-cotta industry during this time period. The work that I did in collection management during my three months there was just a small portion of the range of artifacts and resources that NBAC has to offer.

The National Building Arts Center collections are vast, holding close to 300,000 artifacts (Vespereny, 2014). They contain printed archival material comprised of letters, blueprints, advertisements, drawings and newspaper clippings. The collections also include larger artifacts that represent the various styles and techniques of St. Louis architecture as well as pieces from around the United States including Chicago, New York, Philadelphia and Los Angeles. Terra-cotta, brickwork, granite, stone, cast iron and glass are just some of what is represented in Giles' collection. The Center is set to receive another shipment of artifacts from the Brooklyn Art Museum, this time including a scaled replica of the Statue of Liberty. After the summer of 2016, you will be able to see lady liberty and the Gateway Arch from the front steps of the foundry.

The creation of these collections began as a co-op venture with neighborhood residents in the St. Louis area. Giles described this experience as a type of urban pioneering. In the words of the NBAC founder, architects are ambivalent about saving something from an old building to the point where they have a disdain for it. Mark Gelernter comments on this particular notion in his book on the history of American architecture. He analyzes the Modernist movement that took hold of the architectural world during the 1960s in the United States. "Since its inception, the

Modernist Movement in architecture had attempted to reshape the built environment without consulting those whose lives would be transformed in consequence, all while claiming that the design professionals knew best” (Gelernter, 1999, p. 281). The failure of this modernist agenda stemmed the destruction of the urban renewal of the 1960s in St. Louis (Gelernter, 1999, p. 296). The result of the modernist agenda is found in stacked wooden crates in Sauget.

When I began this project, I had originally only wanted to interview Giles, but my research progressed, and I realized that multiple perspectives were needed in order to create a clear and somewhat concise picture. As a result of this, I interviewed board member Eric Sandweiss and volunteer, Sarah Weeks. In talking to both of these stakeholders, I found similarities in their views on location, mission and organizational challenges of the National Building Arts Center. While both Sandweiss and Weeks both believe that what NBAC offers is a one of a kind organization, their answers on how the Center might proceed in the next ten years differed. My interview with Giles revealed his concerns with present, day to day challenges, including the structural soundness of the foundry and incoming acquisitions. Sandweiss and Weeks expressed their concerns in terms of financial stability and community partnerships.

### **Section 3.1: The Strengths of the National Building Arts Center**

The strengths of the National Building Arts Center include its repository of architectural artifacts, its previous exhibitions in the St. Louis community, the partnerships it has formed over the years and the passion and vision of Giles and his volunteers. In its current state, the National Building Arts Center, acts as a research center, archive, repository and developing building arts museum.

When the scaffolding comes down and the pieces have been lowered to the ground, Giles piles them onto a long black flatbed and trucks them off to his warehouses, where, placed in enormous, custom-built crates, they patiently await their reappearance before the public...he keeps his books, magazines, trade journals, postcards, and office correspondence, comprising of one of the finest private architecture and construction libraries in the nation (Sandweiss, 2007, p. 222).

The National Building Arts Center has a number of strengths as a cultural institution in the St. Louis area. The most prominent of these is the large collection that the Center already has. The 14 buildings that make up the foundry, contain close to 300,000 building arts artifacts. Giles has been collecting architectural artifacts for almost 40 years. His collection contains variety in regards to the building arts and offers the opportunity for scholars to study the different eras of American architecture in one place. But it is not simply the fact that the collection is large, it is also strong because it continues to grow.

Over the decades, Giles has created and fostered relationships with wrecking crews and contracting firms. He possesses the resources and partnerships to know when a building will be knocked down and if he has the chance to save pieces of it. While it may seem to some that these artifacts have no value or significance outside of their original environment, Giles is able to address this issue by providing context in the form of research materials. The library that Giles has created also continues to expand, and the use of historic materials such as letters, blueprints, advertisements, postcards and other paper documentation offer a behind-the-scenes look at how the architecture of cities rise and fall.



The physical size and scale of some of the artifacts that the Center houses is also a strength. Exhibitions are constructed to create impact and leave an imprint in the mind of the visitor. The possibility of a fully functioning building arts museum at the foundry with intricate cornices, an old steel weather ball, drive-in movie signs and terra-cotta flourishes add a factor of wonder excitement into the visitor experience. The Center also has the advantage of material documentation. As I mentioned earlier, I spent the majority of my internship at the National Building Arts Center digitizing a collection of 35 mm negatives that consisted of photos that contextualized Giles' collections. "If an exhibit is intended to present the technological or design development of an object over time, a chronology is usually necessary to illustrate its historical context" (McLean, 1993, p. 23). Having both artifacts and documentation of collection acquisition and history allows the Center to tell a story instead of just show a piece.

The close proximity that the National Building Arts Center has to the city of St. Louis strengthens its mission and vision. The Center's website provides a brief description of both of these.

The National Building Arts Center is a unique, emergent study center housing the nation's largest and most diversified collection of building artifacts, supported with a research library offering broad holdings in architecture and allied arts. Our collection represents the single largest effort toward understanding the American built environment and the historical process of its creation. The Center strives to use its massive collections to educate the public on all aspects of the building arts from design to fabrication ("Mission and Board of Directors", 2014).

While the artifacts are taken out of their original context either due to development, urban renewal or in the name of “progress”, the majority of the artifacts recovered from St. Louis still hold the ability to re-contextualize the city within the framework of an exhibit. “One of the more complete types of object presentation, this “you are there” approach is a technique used by many history and natural history museums. Period rooms, period settings, dioramas, and habitat groups are all types of environmental display” (McLean, 1993, p. 23).

While the Center has the advantage of owning enough space to create period settings or dioramas, they also have the benefit of being directly across the river from the neighborhoods and streets that the buildings in the collection once occupied. In my interview with Eric Sandweiss, he elaborated on the concept of multiple installations in a variety of settings. Sandweiss said that the case of exhibition doesn’t necessarily mean keeping to a single site, although it could be. Instead of housing and displaying all of the artifacts at the Center, exhibition could instead take the form of installations connected across a space or number of spaces around the city. He mentions how this could be used to enhance a number of different neighborhoods. This would give St. Louis multiple identities by way of architecture, adding to the complex culture of the city, and making the decision to destroy it more difficult. Sandweiss also noted the possible ways of interpreting and displaying pieces from the collections at NBAC. Installations could range from traditional and orderly displays, to a more anarchic way of placing things that includes integrating pieces into other existing developments around the city. The suggestions that Sandweiss makes present the Center with the chance to turn remnants of the past into architecture of today by way of exhibiting it within its former environment.

While branching out into the community for exhibition space is a possible opportunity for the Center, the current amount of space that NBAC has to offer is still a huge advantage for the

organization. The 14 buildings that the foundry consists of presents endless opportunities on how the artifacts can be displayed in a single site. This storage space also benefits the organization by supplying ample room to continue on collecting more artifacts and materials. The history behind the foundry is also very central to what the organization wants to achieve through their mission. The importance of architecture, recovery and renewal is reflected in the way that Giles and his volunteers are rehabilitating the warehouses and office spaces to create a nonprofit centered around the building arts and architecture, and can illuminate the mission of the organization further.

The past accomplishments of the Center is another one of its strengths. Since 1982, Giles has collaborated with St. Louis area museums and cultural institutions to exhibit the built environment of the city. The Center has shown pieces of its collection with Washington University in St. Louis, The First Street Forum, the Missouri Botanical Garden, the University of Missouri, the Missouri History Museum, the National Building Museum in Washington D.C., the Sculpture Center in New York, the Sheldon Art Galleries and many more. These partnerships and collaborations show the range and reach of the Center as a repository for architectural artifacts.

Partnerships with the National Building Arts Center also add to the credibility of the organization as a whole. In the past, the Center has collaborated with scholars and researchers, providing them either with resources, artefactual or resource based, to use for published projects. One of the most recent collaborations was with architectural historian and member of Friends of Terra Cotta, Sharon Darling. Darling used the letters from the W.H. Junge collection of correspondence between Junge, James Taylor and Henry Plasschaert to learn more about the terra-cotta industry in Chicago during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Myself and one

other intern worked on transcribing these letters from the collection and formatted them into Darling's style of cataloging. This type of collaboration is just one of the many opportunities that the National Building Arts Center has had in the past to reach out and create partnerships.

### **Section 3.2: The Challenges of the National Building Arts Center**

The weaknesses of the National Building Arts Center for the most part are administrative, financial and developmental. Throughout my research I found that financial support, community outreach, the physical condition of the foundry, the absence of staffing and resources and an unclear target audience are the main contributors to the slow growth of the nonprofit. Giles originally began his business as a for-profit institution seemingly more focused on recovery than public exhibition. Eventually it evolved into the nonprofit cultural institution centered on research and exhibition that it is today. After conducting my research, it was clear that the main challenge the National Building Arts Center is facing in moving forward with its efforts to reach the public, is funding. Volunteer Sarah Weeks expressed her concerns over the lack of a funding structure and saw the cause to be the absence of a developmental department. She said that this has stunted the organization's ability to grow in fundraising and program services. My interview with Sandweiss revealed similar concerns. The question of how difficult it is for an organization to get the money to restore, rebuild, install, display and educate was posed in his answer. He noted how much money all of those endeavors take, and how it's not just a one-time only donation, grant or contribution that is needed, but a legacy.

In order to understand the larger picture of the Center's financial situation, I analyzed the organization's 990 reports between 2010 and 2014. Over this five year period the revenue varies between \$54,205 and \$417,312. This unsteady stream of cash flow is alarming because it projects no predictable future for the financial situation of the organization, leaving them to rely

on revenues on year by year basis, putting long-term projects at risk of never being completed. Over the five year period, revenue streams are only found under the categories of contributions and grants, and ‘other’. The only year with income arriving from a different stream of revenue is 2014, where \$247,669 was earned through investments. While investments are a strong and smart decision for any nonprofit organization to make, if the amount of funds to invest are few, the impact on the organizations financial situation will not be definite. “Living “hand-to-mouth,” they depend on limited cash reserves and occasional short-term bank loans to maintain cash flow” (Coe, 2011).

The clear lack of any revenue coming from programming or fundraising is also concerning. While the most recent revenue from the 2014 is the highest of all five years, the fluctuation during this time period is cause for worry. The lack of a steady stream of income that is somewhat controllable by the organization itself, leaves the Center to depend on funding on an annual basis, unsure of what might befall them. The key to a successful nonprofit organization is variety in finances. This allows the organization to cover itself if an investment fails, a grant falls through or an unexpected disaster takes place, drying up certain funds. The unpredictable income of the National Building Arts Center can in most part be attributed to the fact that in the five year period there is no revenue from program service. The only year in which any money is spent on advertising and promotions is 2012. Giles, Sandweiss and Weeks all express similar concerns on the issue of unsteady streams of revenue. Giles pointed out that a large contributor to being stuck at the bottom are the costly recovery projects. Funds are allocated to complete and pay for the recovery of artifacts. A team must be assembled, equipment has to be bought or acquired and the labor is intensive and strenuous. Giles attributes the scarcity of recovery projects done by other

organizations to the amount of costs and challenges that they present. As much as these recovery projects cost, they do not bring in any income to supplement the debts accrued.

While I mentioned the unique idea of a building arts museum as a strength in the previous section, it can also be seen as a challenge. While the work of the National Building Arts Center is progressive in terms of creating a different type of museum different from most, financial and community support is minimal in terms of what is needed to bounce off of the bottom. Giles sees a general consensus in the idea that we as the public do not want to have to look at what was demolished because it will only remind us of its destruction. Giles estimates that around 70 percent of the architecture of St. Louis built between during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries has been demolished, and as he puts it, “what remains, only just begins to suggest what was lost”.

Suggesting what was lost can take the form of advertising, promotion and branding, but has not been done yet in a way that benefits the Center in a hugely impactful way. While the Center is not in the physical shape to exhibit their materials yet, funds spent on advertising geared towards fundraising and promotional events will create a stream of revenue almost completely absent from the Center’s financial records. This cannot be achieved if the majority of the financial resources continue to be put into the structural renovations of the foundry.

The financial analysis of the National Building Arts Center does not begin and end with revenue streams though. While the organization has failed to create a steady stream of income and maintain consistent revenue numbers between 2010 and 2014, the net income is constantly in the clear. Yet, the stagnant and somewhat nonexistent programing and fundraising that is not happening may in time have long term effects on the financial situation of the center.

Partnerships are one possible solution. Weeks mentioned the great potential for partnerships that the Center already has, but explains that they need to be “shored up and embellished” to be fully

utilized. The National Building Arts Center has built up relationships with demolition, architectural, cultural and educational organizations in the community. Capitalizing on those relationships and cultivating a support system connected to funding could be the next step in getting the Center to get off the ground.

Costs at the National Building Arts Center are in large part attributed to the renovation of the foundry and outside recovery projects. A number of the buildings that the Center's collections are currently housed in are not structurally sound. Giles, along with a small team of volunteers have been working on renovating the foundations and framing across the foundry campus. During the summer of 2015, Giles worked on running electricity through all of the buildings as well. While the challenge presented by the structural unsoundness of some of the buildings, Weeks points out that in terms of place, and the importance it, there are strong connections between the mission of the Center and where it is located. For a cultural institution like the National Building Arts Center and any nonprofit centered on the arts, it matters how an organization works with environment and how organizational spaces are landscaped (Congdon, 2008, p. 75). While the Center is facing a struggle not only to keep its organization from being lost in a mix of nonprofits, it is also important for the organization to use the relationship it has between the mission it gives the public and the place that it calls home.

As mentioned before when talking about advertising and promotions, community outreach is a challenge for the Center. While there are collaborations, NBAC usually provides the resources for projects instead of presenting the finished product in terms of exhibition and research. There are many causes for this, the first being staffing. As addressed on the financial reports, there are no paid staff at the Center. While Giles is the owner of the organization, NBAC is run completely by volunteers. The lack of money spent on salaries is cause for inconsistency and the

prolonged duration of a number of major projects. The organization's unclear target audience is another factor in its slow growth. In order to execute an effective promotional campaign and avoid wasting time and resources, deciding who the organization wants to appeal might be key to its success. This is a crucial point that could be taken into consideration for the National Building Arts Center when trying to decide how to allocate finances, resources and time.

While there are weaknesses that the National Building Arts Center faces and proposed solutions to handling them, there are challenges in accomplishing what it is the National Building Arts Center wants to become over the course of the next ten years. I asked each of my participants what they see for the future of the organization, and their answers were similar versions of each other. Volunteer Sarah Weeks suggested that the Center focus on internal structure, first calling for regular meetings of the board of directors. From that point on, a social media campaign could be organized and implemented, and fundraisers arranged. Finding a funding source, even a small one is the Center's top priority at the moment. From there, making the buildings across the foundry structurally sound and up to date come in a close second. But the challenge arises in the implementation of these goals. The board as of now, does not meet, and some of the members are not living in St. Louis. Calling a regular meeting, either annually or biannually may be the right approach, but incorporating this type of protocol into the structure of the organization is the most immediate need according to Weeks.

As was mentioned in the current challenges of the organization, a steady stream of funding for the Center needs to be identified in order for a number of projects and initiatives to move forward. Fundraising and applying for government grants could be major solutions to this problem, but the challenge in undertaking grant writing and program management is the need for a staff or volunteers to do them. These are not small tasks, and finding the right team passionate



about raising funds and community awareness is a challenge when the only incentive may be personal interest in the organization. It is clear though, that relying solely on contributions and investment income for funding may not be the most financially sensible decision.

The need to finish renovating and restoring the foundry is an immediate and enormous challenge that the National Building Arts Center needs to overcome before any type of educational programming could be implemented. Creating not only a safe space for the artifacts and research materials, but the public who wishes to use them is essential. Again, funding ties into this challenge for obvious reasons, but mainly due to the reason that it is the first and largest project that must be undertaken before any design for a building arts museum can be put in place.

### **Section 3.3 Opportunities for the National Building Arts Center**

Following the background research, interviews, personal experience evaluation and case study analysis, I have come up with three different suggestions or “opportunities” to combat the challenges the National Building Arts Center is currently facing. While I already mentioned some possible suggestions in the previous section, the three opportunities touch on now include the topics of organizational stability, finances and community outreach. Although the number of challenges that the Center has outnumber the opportunities I list, I believe that all of them have the potential to fit under one of the three umbrella categories of finances, advertising and stability.

The first opportunity that the National Building Arts Center could take advantage of is community outreach. This could begin with brand recognition and awareness. Creating a strong, recognizable logo based off of uniform graphic standards would simplify the process of creating promotional materials. Clear and concise marketing strategies based on the needs of the

organization including long-term or short-term goals could then be incorporated into advertising campaigns. Having an image that is recognizable and easily relatable is a type of advertising that only needs to be done once and done right to be effective. “Given the economic, social, and environmental impacts that tourism creates, destinations require sensitive understanding and careful guidance in the development and management of the brands that represent them. Brands help determine a destination’s future in that they make promises to the tourists who visit as well as to the inhabitants who belong” (Blain, Levy, and Ritchie 2005; Gover and Go 2011) (Campelo et. al., 2013, p. 154). An updated image or message from NBAC might also help them succeed when it comes to relevancy in the community. The current motto of the National Building Arts Center is “Preserving Our Future, Promoting Our Past”. A logo would create a look for the organization that sometimes words fail to describe. Graphic standards and a marketing strategy to back up the Center’s organizational structure would also create a consistency not only to what the public sees, but a cohesiveness throughout the organization with clear guidelines on how the National Building Arts Center wants to be perceived.

The next possible opportunity has to do with organizational stability, but includes an aspect of community outreach that addresses educational opportunities and partnerships with the community. In order to begin the process of a stable developmental department, creating clear guidelines on applying for government and community grants could be the first step. The next phase would be deciding who would complete these tasks, and as was presented in an earlier section, this has proven to be a challenge. Community outreach and educational opportunities might be considered to fill this gap. While the Center already works to recruit volunteers and offer internships, I found during my time there, finding people to fill these positions has also been proven to be a challenge. The opportunity that might address this challenge could include

creating a variety of internships that range over a number of categories including collection management, marketing and advertising, construction, grant writing, archival work and preservation. Taking into consideration the large amount of work that needs to be done and lack of money available to pay a full-time staff, creating a variety of internships and practicums with consistent and detailed objectives would be a consideration to take into account. These opportunities have the potential to attract young professionals in the fields of arts management, architecture, art, history, art history, museum studies and nonprofit management while helping both the students and the Center at the same time. Currently, the National Building Arts Center offers one type of internship with a number of different duties. By hiring interns with specialized positions, the Center would not only be extending its reach beyond the walls of the foundry, but it would be accomplishing the part of its mission dedicated to education and research.

Partnerships also have the opportunity to play a large role in the continued development and growth of the National Building Arts Center. As I mentioned earlier, Giles already has long-term relationships with the artistic, architectural, educational, historic and cultural sectors of St. Louis. Finding out the true potential for all of those relationships is the next step that could be taken moving forward. Partnerships present promotional as well as financial and developmental possibilities. They could be used to distribute advertising and marketing materials in institutions with similar interests to the National Building Arts Center. This might help the Center find a clearer target audience as well. Partnerships might also help NBAC financially. During our interview, Sandweiss discussed these types of partnerships and how the Center could look to capture the imagination of people in the St. Louis community with a combination of successful leadership capabilities and the funds to invest and take bold steps in something that is as unusual and unique as what the Center does.

The third and final opportunity has to do with the financial situation of the organization and possibilities for fundraising. The Center has all of the tools to create a strategy for fundraising. The space for fundraising activities and events is clear; the foundry consists of 14 buildings and 15 acres of land. This is enough land to host possible annual or biannual events dedicated to helping fund different projects at the center. While the funds are currently tight to host events such as these, considering fundraising as an investment might balance out the risk to reward ratio. If programming is done successfully and consistently, the payback runs a high possibility of outweighing the expense in the long run. By implementing a more frequent form of fundraising, it might help the Center cultivate multiple target audiences and to find out who wants to learn more, who is intrigued and who is doing research similar to what the National Building Arts Center provides to the public. A system and calendar dedicated to government and community grant applications is another suggestion that NBAC might take into consideration. By creating clear and concise guidelines for applications, applying for grants might become easier due to this type of streamlined process. As time goes on, funding might also become more predictable as consistent fundraising, grant writing and marketing are implement and refined.

#### **Section 4: Conclusions**

Concluding research for this project showed that there are three main themes in both the successes and challenges of the National Building Arts Center. Community outreach, organizational stability and finances were integral to this study. Partnerships with similar cultural institutions have the possibility to be a strong resources for outreach that could create a larger and more lasting image and imprint on the community. Efforts to stabilize the internal structure of the organization, in regards to staff, standards and structure might help the National Building Arts Center strengthen its mission and vision. In this paper, I addressed the educational aspect of

creating more specialized internships in order to divide work evenly resulting in more efficient task management. Creating a solid financial structure where the board of directors meets on an annual or biannual basis would help reinforce the ideas of fundraising, marketing and branding that the Center might use to capitalize on in order to gain a larger audience and accomplish its long-term and short-term goals.

It is clear the National Building Arts Center is stable in its collection of the building arts and related materials. A clear organizational structure might aide in resolving a multitude of any current challenges. Creating a financial and developmental structure devoted to growth and outreach might make branding, promoting and advertising for the National Building Arts Center a successful endeavor. This in turn could create an established museum and research center capable of serving the community it represents. The Center wants to present St. Louis with a history of architecture unlike any other in the United States, and it has great potential to do so. This research project reflects the redevelopment that might take place prior to creating the unique programing that NBAC is capable of offering.

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