

JEAN GULLION AND AUDREY WOOLL

February 25, 1986

INTERVIEWER: What is the first year in which you became involved with Shaw?

JEAN GULLION: We were trying to think of that yesterday, whether it was...

AUDREY WOOLL: Brian Doherty phoned me and asked me if I would put together a women's guild for this theatre. Whether that was '61 or '62 I wouldn't be able to tell you, but it was right at the beginning. There was a nucleus, I don't mean to say that I, like, we just gathered together. There was Jean (Gullion), Margherita Howe and there were some who weren't in it from the...

INTERVIEWER: Starting from the beginning what did you do, other than getting your group together? What was the area where you worked? Did you organize ticket sales?

JEAN GULLION: Mainly at first it was the ticket sales.

AUDREY WOOLL: Well, yes, but I think - that's '64, and whether there were any before that I don't know - that was subscription - and I think from the first, well, we tried to make the place attractive, didn't we.

INTERVIEWER: That was the Court House?

AUDREY WOOLL: Yes, because there were just wooden seats - those folding chairs, you know, and they were as hard as rocks and no air conditioning; it was just incredible, and when the actors got into their makeup and so on, there was nothing but bitching, really.

INTERVIEWER: Well, they had no facilities at all, did they.

AUDREY WOOLL: No, that's true, it was poor there. But we were lucky in the setting itself; and awful lot of people loved that Court House.

JEAN GULLION: That's true, because it was the way it was.

AUDREY WOOLL: You know, you can go to Toronto to any theatre, and it's a bit like Shaw today, but at the Court House Theatre you walked up those stairs in your long dresses and so forth and it was a fun thing and I think we got a tremendous number of people from the US

JEAN GULLION: Well, the Americans are great theatre people, anyway, and so close.

AUDREY WOOLL: Yes, but the very fact that Cal and Pat were American, and the Sheets, we've always had a lot of Americans here.

JEAN GULLION: And we had a lot more then because all those summer places were American

AUDREY WOOLL: And all those people were patrons. The Hahns, the Wettlaufers and the Oppenheims and the Marcys and they did their own advertising, didn't they, with their friends, and brought in a lot of people.

JEAN GULLION: Opening nights were quite posh in those days, weren't they? Everybody in dress.

INTERVIEWER: Can you describe an opening night?

AUDREY WOOLL: It was out at Rand's. At Rand's they had a marquee.

JEAN GULLION: First of all we would entertain the staff out at Rand's, the cast for dinner, and then after the theatre we would supply the food for the after-theatre-party which was usually quite large.

AUDREY WOOLL: And that was before there was any finance to cope.

INTERVIEWER: So you just contributed, made your sandwiches, your sweets.

AUDREY WOOLL: Yes, everybody donated. And everybody was working up to the penny, really, because the ticket sales...

JEAN GULLION: We did all the washing up. We didn't have anybody to help us. We were in the kitchen there doing the dishes until all hours of the morning, 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning. Oh yes, and Margherita lost a silver fork or something and we went through all the garbage. Somebody and his girlfriend got in the hammock, do you remember that, that was quite late, and it was all, well, if we hadn't had so much fun we never would have done the work. No, we couldn't have kept it up because it was ridiculous. You had to be dedicated. You had to want the theatre.

INTERVIEWER: Well, you must have worked almost constantly while the theatre was in season.

JEAN GULLION: On tickets we worked every day, didn't we. Every single day.

AUDREY WOOLL: And Jean, I think, carried the load.

JEAN GULLION: No, no. I did not, you were the one who handled the money.

AUDREY WOOLL: And the thing that irked us was that—it wasn't a satisfactory arrangement for Jean and me because there was no way of checking subscriptions and the numbers in the theatre in the sense that some people bought subscriptions but didn't come and the whole thing was missing a check, really, wasn't it Jean?

JEAN GULLION: It was a loose, loose arrangement. Well, they would just take some of the money if they wanted some supplies or they wanted a party at night or something. We didn't have any control over that. We would get all this money in and then that is the way it would go.

AUDREY WOOLL: And it irked both of us who were rushing around there to get those things mailed out.

JEAN GULLION: It was the same with the drinks as we were looking at that list of yours. We didn't have any check on that. We had all these orangeades and lemonades, well the cast would go up there for rehearsal or something and just help themselves to everything.

AUDREY WOOLL: And I just said we need our money. this is a copy of a letter I sent to the Treasurer of the Board of Directors and statement from the Women's Committee to Shaw Theatre. (read letter and statement)

JEAN GULLION: That was \$14.96 and you can imagine how much we donated to it if it cost only \$14.96.

AUDREY WOOLL: Under tickets for liquor June 28 for the Shaw cast and the press I charged them \$100. Six tickets for the press, August 9. The press really should have had free tickets but there was no policy.

INTERVIEWER: When in charge of ticket sales, where did you work? Did you have an office?

AUDREY WOOLL: Yes, it was something like 80 Queen Street and that was the old shoe repair shop, just up from what is now Cameron Jeffries. We had a couple of desks on one side and Ian Gent had a desk at the front where you came in. Ian was sort of office manager and did the banking. We were across from the bank, which was handy.

INTERVIEWER: In those early days, when selling tickets would you advertise in the newspaper, I suppose.

AUDREY WOOLL: We didn't at first. I think the very first production - remember we did "Don Juan in Hell".

JEAN GULLION: Yes it was only one night.

AUDREY WOOLL: I remember the Standard was very clever about us. They said that it was very appropriate because it was so hot. I think that the tickets were...And that's another thing, the men like Jack Gullion and Lionel Magder and...everybody was volunteer and whoever sold the tickets was volunteer. I think at the first performance they were selling tickets right at the theatre somewhere, at a table or something.

JEAN GULLION: The men would go up and take tickets and usher.

AUDREY WOOLL: Everyone had to have a ticket to get in and that was another mess because again they had guests and that would have been fine...You know they're looking ahead to when they're going to have their theatre so they wanted...like the price of tickets in those days was so little and it would have been much better except that we had nothing to run the theatre on if we didn't charge. You know, it wasn't as if anyone was bankrolling the thing. There was nothing except what the tickets...there were no grants or anything...and the orange juice was sold, and if there was any other function up there we had a deal with the Avondale and they brought in a refrigerator chest, well it was an upright one at first, and then they upgraded that, and we had lemon and orange.

JEAN GULLION: We couldn't sell liquor then. We had to have a banquet licence but that was later on. That was a big day when we could get one of those; it was just orange and lemon, not even Coke because he had a deal with us. Was it 15 cents we paid him and we charged 25 cents? We didn't make much anyway, maybe it was 10 cents. It was very little. I don't know how we made any money at all. We made \$949 on soft drinks a(looking at a sheet from the file) but liquor was on that one.

AUDREY WOOLL: You see, that was a good thing for us that there was no air conditioning because the people all drank so much, and how they ever got to the bathroom is beyond me because the only bathrooms were downstairs there, and everybody would shirk from going. And then when we had an occasion and we used the small hall and we set the budgets and whatever appropriate, we lugged everything up the fire escape and took it in that way and set it up and brought tablecloths, candelabras, candle sticks.

JEAN GULLION: Actors would use the kitchen to mix up paint and everything else, and it would have to be cleaned up. You wouldn't believe it, it would be so filthy. Margherita Howe was one of the ones who did a lot of that. It was just incredible that anybody would leave the place in such a mess and then they would expect it to be cleaned up, so it was scrubbing many days. If you wanted to serve any food you had to scrub. That kitchen was just a little dark hole, It was a terrible kitchen then.

I remember one day, it was wintertime, and I saw Brian and some others out on the golf course and I thought - nothing had been said about the golf course at that time - and I said to myself, something is going on there.

AUDREY WOOLL: It was a dumb move. It may not have been so dumb if they had had better public relations but

here we were, told in the paper where the theatre was to be built. nobody came to speak to us at a meeting. They just told us that that was where they had decided and a lot of the ladies were golfers or their husbands were. And they said, what makes them think that they can set a theatre there but the golfer who enjoys his game can't golf there. And you could understand that. So that was how we got into such a flap about the site.

INTERVIEWER: Any humorous incidents you can remember?

AUDREY WOOLL: The first professional play - it was sold out and there was great excitement - flowers were in place, I think they even had some air conditioning by that time - or they had those great big fans. The actors and actresses arrived for a rehearsal back stage and their union insisted that they must have a facility back stage. This caused a big furor and somebody asked if they could manage with a commode chair. One of the ladies, one of the workers (Mary Walsh), had one and she went home and scrubbed up this chair and brought it in down the aisle amongst all this glamour, as we thought that we had there, and we were terrified because the press were there and we could imagine that they were going to write it up as being so small town after all our work, but Murray Thompson, I think it was he, one of the reporters, at any rate someone came to me and said he would see that didn't get into the paper and spoil all our hard work.

JEAN GULLION: When you think back the whole thing was primitive. Just some big fans to cool the air, folding chairs, and they were so hard. Remember when we got those cushions? Where did they come from?

AUDREY WOOLL: Yes, that was a big thing. I think that some might have been Sarah Lansing. She was a patron and was appalled at the hard seats.

JEAN GULLION: And so often the power would fail. We had lamps, and then when we were trying to serve the drinks I didn't know if I was getting a \$1 bill or a \$10 bill. And it was the same thing out at the Rand's. The power would go off there when we were having a party out there.

AUDREY WOOLL: Really, it was very gracious of the Rand's. They loaned their house every time for the parties.

JEAN GULLION: Remember how the cast would have their dinner in the dining room and the doors would be closed and we wouldn't let anyone else in that dining room. It was very private. That was because we didn't have enough food. Everybody would try to get some. They were starving. Everybody brought a favourite dish or something which they thought the cast might like, because, really, we got to know a lot of them by then, so we wanted it to be special. I remember closing it all off and not letting anyone else in there for fear we wouldn't have enough food to feed them.

AUDREY WOOL AND JEAN GULLION: And then we ran out of plates. That was really the straw that nearly broke the camel's back that night. We were serving dinner...no we were going to have a party later on after the performance and we were taking everything out to set up. The Rand's had distinguished guests, Robarts, or whomever, and they had that catered. And that was fine, but Margherita Howe, remember, she was just livid about that. Like we were one catering group going in as the other one was coming out. And we felt very much like a catering group, too. Remember having to use the back door. So when we got set up out there, we had to make more...this was between 10 and 11 at night when we would be doing this, because it was after the performance...there was not a crumb left and someone had gone home and made something. Then we didn't have enough plates and I asked Cal and he said we would have to ask Pat, because we would be using their plates, and remember they wouldn't let us use their dishwasher - we had to wash everything by hand. And they had house guests staying there and they came down looking for something to eat and there was nothing. Remember, they were so hungry. And Marguerite was so embarrassed, you know how she loves to feed people anyway. And she went on and on, what are we going to do, there is nothing in the house? And I said, well, we didn't take their food, we only used our own food and borrowed their plates.