

Comparative Research on Underground Music Archives in the American South

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Abstract

This presentation discusses ongoing research into the similarities and differences between approaches of archiving local music community history from both academic and community-based initiatives. Academic affiliated approaches include the Louisville Underground Music Archive at the University of Louisville, the Southern Punk Archive at Ole Miss, and the Rose Library's Atlanta Punk Periodicals collection at Emory University. Community-based archival initiatives include the Memphis Punk Archive, the Nashville Underground Music Archive, and the 309 Punk Project in Pensacola, focusing on the Florida Panhandle punk scene.

These archives focus on underground and punk music primarily in the South, a seemingly unconventional location for these scenes, placing this historically under-represented subculture in an often hostile environment. The cultural significance of these initiatives involves a re-examination of the role of archives with regard to community engagement, involvement, and traditional concepts of archival practice within the community-based projects.

This research examines the emergence of new models from various local history practitioners, with potential precedent for further archival engagements in other scenes, regions, and communities. The presentation of the U of L archivists previously at the SAA conference outlined struggles and opportunities for the academic setting. This presentation combines an approach from community-based archival practices with underground music cultural conventions. This presentation intends to solicit feedback on proposed comparisons of their cross-disciplinary collaborations, outreach and engagement with new audiences. Specific benefits would further examine their acquisition practices, processing methods, and research potential in preservation protocol, access to the collections, arrangement and description from these underground music archives.

About the author:

A PhD student in Public History at MTSU, *Jon Sewell* works in the Center for Popular Music, an archive, research, and programming center. As founder of the Nashville Underground Music Archive, he researches the interplay of locally homegrown musical communities with the dominant recording industry, back to its inception in the 1940s. Current practice focuses on developing the material culture holdings of printed matter and ephemera from the 1950s through '60s period. Through his database, thenashvilleunderground.org, he chronicles these early scenes, through the '80s and '90s into the 21st century. A physical archive includes an extensive vinyl collection, zines, printed matter, glossies, and even reel-to-reel tapes.

A native Nashvillian, Sewell created and manages The Packing Plant, a community arts hub that provides space for small galleries, a poetry library, and community-run non-profit radio station, WXNA. His background in museums includes previous work as a design engineer on the fabrication side as well as interpretive design. As former editor of the southern arts journal, *Number:*, and local irreverent bi-monthly zine, *Salt Weekly*, Sewell continues to

participate in the local independent publishing community in Nashville, with its long history of influential publishing practices, primarily where arts and printed matter intersect.