Timeline Case Studies
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Case Study #1
Records of Early English Drama (REED), *Patrons and Performances Web Site*
(http://link.library.utoronto.ca/reed/)

The *Patrons and Performances Web Site* is a database concerning patronized touring performance history in pre-1642 England. It abstracts data on events involving a variety of patronized performers contained in the transcribed records of the published REED series, supplementing this data with additional data concerning the people who patronized these performers, the routes they travelled, and the venues in which they performed.

Information contained in the database is dated whenever possible. The core data and dates relate to (primarily performance) events. This data is derived in the majority of cases from the financial accounts of the towns and cities, guilds, private households and religious establishments that paid for these performances. The accounting practices of these places are extensively varied and often not internally consistent, but they provide the majority of the evidence of where and when a troupe performed, and are the basis for the construction of the touring itineraries of individual troupes (and also the range of years when the troupe is known to have been active). Sometimes these accounts give a precise date of payment/ performance, but often the dating evidence for an event is derived from a payment made in an accounting period (a week, a quarter, a year), a feast period (Christmas), a particular occasion ('when X was here'), an unspecified date before or after a specified date (before Easter, after Lady Day) or between two specified dates (in cases where it can be determined that account entries were entered chronologically). The database's Interactive Map contains the historical roads that linked together the places where performances took place, and some tentative

surmises can be made about how much time it may have taken to get from point A to point B based on where and when a troupe appeared in a given year.

While it of course would be of great advantage to represent on a timeline the dates of performances of patronized touring entertainers in order to attempt to reconstruct their itineraries, it would be important to see these dates along with the span of dates showing for what periods documents recording these performances are extant. This information is crucial in any analysis of the evidence: for example, a *Patrons* website or timeline user who notices that a particular troupe ceases to perform after a given year in a town where they used to perform regularly might mistakenly think that the troupe cut that town out of their touring route, when the explanation is that the town accounts are only extant up to that given year. Informed speculation about when a troupe was formed, when it was active and when it disbanded, likewise, is dependent on knowing the range of years covered (and not covered) by the REED documents that would be expected to provide information about that troupe's activities.

These events and itineraries are crucial for understanding the historical practices of provincial touring – which in turn informs understandings of sociopolitical relations, cultural transmission and the place and forms of entertainment in everyday life – and in revising common misconceptions of such touring as an extraordinary or at best occasional activity involving third-rate 'rude mechanicals' or professional troupes prohibited from playing in London. However, while the events and itineraries prove the existence of a longstanding tradition of provincial touring, they do not reveal the forces or conditions that shaped how that touring evolved and operated.

This is where the additional dating information in the database comes into play. Besides birth and death and other significant biographical dates for patrons, the database contains data and associated dates on titles (knighthoods, peerages, kingships), offices (ranging in purview from household to national), residences and

properties, and family relations. We also have dated data relating to performance venues and spaces. Theoretically, all this dated data can provide a context for analyzing and possibly explaining why troupes originated and disappeared when they did, travelled and performed where they did, and were paid what they were paid: if there is a dated correlation between places where a troupe appears and the power and connections (be they office, land or family based) a patron has at a given moment in his/her life, this may help in understanding the forces that shaped provincial touring in the early modern period, and the significance that touring had for early modern English culture.

At present, this data is atomized on the *Patrons* website: there is no interface that enables a user to see this dated data together. Being able to map this complex data on a timeline would enable one to see potential areas of interest for further inquiry. For instance, a troupe's sudden expansion of its touring into regions of England in which it never appeared previously might be explained through the correlation of the dates of the relevant performances with the dates of a grant of a new office or lands or a date of marriage into a family who exercised power in that region. Disparities in payments by a town or household to different troupes might be similarly explained by a patron's influence, rather than being put down to a supposed difference in the quality or quantity of a troupe's performances or the size of the town's purse. These are only two of many types of insights that could result from being able to see the *Patrons and Performances Web Site* data on a timeline.

Case Study #2
Records of Early English Drama (REED), *London Theatres Bibliography* **(***LTB***)**
(in development; launching late 2010)

Essentially, the *LTB* is a richly-annotated bibliography that tracks the post-1642 transcription history of pre-1642 documents relating to the London-area theatres. Initial plans to use SIMILE's Timeline tool were discarded once it was realized that there was a variety of dating information contained in the *LTB* and the relationship

between these types of dates could not be adequately indicated using the SIMILE Timeline.

The *LTB* surveys post-1642 secondary sources whose authors are known to have made their transcriptions of pre-1642 documents from the originals, and records what was transcribed and how, and how those documents were cited (i.e., shelfmark, repository). Because documents sometimes moved from one repository to another, were catalogued according to different classification systems, and were described differently, it is extremely valuable to know that what scholar A in the 18th century cites as C in library Y is the same as what scholar B in the 19th century cites as D in library Z, especially if A and B transcribed different portions from a single document, making it appear that this single document is two different documents. Besides the dates of publication of these secondary sources, which provide important information about when original documents (or portions thereof) first appeared in published scholarship (and in what form), the sources also provide dates for the original documents, some of which may have been supplied by the scholar rather than by the source, some of which, in turn, may be erroneous, but which may have become established in subsequent scholarship.

The *LTB* builds upon this foundational bibliographical work to aggregate an event record that summarizes the content of an original document as provided by its transcriptions. This date of the content being described in the document is often not the same as the date on which the document was created: for example, a letter describing a riot at a theatre may have been written a day or more after the event; in extreme cases, an event might be first recorded in a quasi-autobiographical work featuring a famous actor long after it purportedly happened. Dates of historical occurrences may be well-documented or they may be a matter of scholarly speculation and therefore create a range of possible and irresolvable dates.

The *LTB*, therefore, contains a complex interrelation of dates: original document date(s) (internal/external, correct/contested/erroneous), dates of

transcription/publication dates of secondary sources (including revised/enlarged editions), event dates (internal/external, correct/contested/erroneous), active dates of people and troupes (derived in the *LTB* from the dates of the earliest and latest documents that mention them).

As a resource that tracks the transcription history of documents relating to the London-area theatres and thus the development of theatre history scholarship, a timeline would be seem to be a logical way to visualize the *LTB*'s content. However, the challenges of mapping the *LTB*'s content on a timeline without facilitating misrepresentation are formidable. For example, if an original dated document describes an undated event that has been dated variously by scholars, where do we place these various dates? On the timeline on the dates the scholars suggest (with attributions to the scholars) or on the timeline on the date when the suggestion was published (or both)? And can a timeline show how one scholar's supplying of a date was taken up by subsequent scholars and contested by later scholars – represent, in essence, the timeline of the shifts in scholarly consensus and division? How can we link items on a timeline to convey to a user that 17th-century scholar A's document X is not a new document they haven't encountered, but rather the document she knows as Y? How can we ensure that when a user sees on a timeline that 18th-century scholar B transcribed document C that she is aware that B only transcribed two lines, not the whole of C, and therefore doesn't make the assumption that the whole document had been fully transcribed in the 18th century, when in fact it had only been so in the 20th?