

History Happens

News from the



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February 2018

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Project archivist Bill Levay scanning the Bay Area Reporter

Putting the *Bay Area Reporter* Online: Three Decades of LGBTQ News One Week at a Time

by Bill Levay

The *Bay Area Reporter* is the longest running continually published LGBTQ weekly in the United States. Launched in 1971, the newspaper is an incredibly rich resource for tracing the recent past in the Bay Area and

beyond. Since it launched its [own website](#) in 2005, the paper has posted every issue online, but the complete run published in the preceding years was available only if you visited our archives or reviewed the microfilm edition available in a handful of libraries.

To fill this gap, a small team here at the GLBT Historical Society has been quietly digitizing those earlier issues. The first batch of full-text-searchable, high-resolution scans covering the years 1994 through 2005 is now posted online, with full details available [on our website](#). Many issues remain to be digitized, so we'll be periodically adding to the digital archive as we progress. When the project is complete, we'll have created a publicly accessible collection of three-plus decades of LGBTQ and Bay Area news, written week by week.

Backward Through the Years

The project got underway at the start of 2017 thanks to a generous grant from the Bob Ross Foundation. We purchased a professional-grade scanner and began planning how we would make more than 1,500 issues of the *Bay Area Reporter* available online. Following standards from the California Digital Newspaper Collection and the National Digital Newspaper Program, we developed procedures, then recruited interns and volunteers to scan the pages one spread at a time. If you're interested in the technical details, check out this [post on my blog](#).

We're scanning backward through time, which is a strange way to experience a run of a newspaper. Stories covered week after week seem to unfold in reverse. Perhaps most affecting so far is the contrast between the cautious optimism of the famous front-page story headlined "[No Obits](#)" in the issue published on August 13, 1998, and the overwhelming number of obituaries in each issue that we're seeing as we reach the point of scanning issues from the darkest years of the AIDS crisis in the early 1990s.

New Perspectives on Recent History

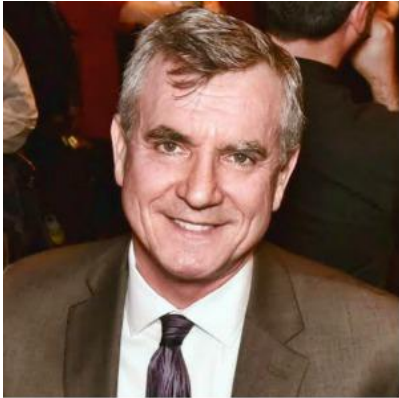
I'm especially excited to see what eye-opening digital humanities projects might spring from this collection, especially regarding the advertisements, which have attracted little scholarly attention. Perhaps a longitudinal study of ads targeted to lesbian women or transgender people or an analysis of changes in the "backpage boys" ads or pharmaceutical ads could give us new perspectives on this recent history.

Our most valuable resource on this project continues to be our tireless volunteers who, once they've become familiar with the digitization process, can get through scanning an impressive number of issues in a single shift. We've done a lot of work, but we still have a ways to go. If you or someone you know is interested in helping us reach the finish line,

please contact me at bill@glbthistory.org. To learn more about the *Bay Area Reporter* archives and to search the back issues, [click here](#).

Bill Levay is the project archivist for the Bay Area Reporter digitization initiative at the GLBT Historical Society.

From the Executive Director Seeking Passionate History Advocates



by Terry Beswick

The GLBT Historical Society has always been a community-based, volunteer-driven operation. And as an institution created in the early years of the AIDS epidemic, we have always had an activist orientation. From day one, we've held that our efforts advance social justice by preserving LGBTQ history and culture and making it available to researchers, students, artists, activists and the public at large.

Our volunteer working groups continue this tradition of engagement, passion and creativity with deep roots in the community. We currently have five standing working groups focused on key initiatives: Archives, Communications, Exhibitions, Historic Places, and Programming and Education.

With memberships ranging from five to 25 people including at least one staff member, each working group is governed by a charter that defines its responsibilities. The groups help conceive and undertake core activities to carry out our [five-year strategic plan](#). Members make at least a six-month commitment so they can help plan and complete projects.

Matching Volunteers to Interests

Working group members plug into aspects of the Historical Society's work that interest them. For example, the Communications Working Group is charged with informing our members and the public about our activities, planning the monthly newsletter, handling media outreach, curating our social media presence and developing communications strategies.

"It was really when I began volunteering that I understood how the different facets of the organization work," says Mark Sawchuk, who is in his second year on the Communications Working Group. "We create messaging for a variety of audiences, so every month presents exciting opportunities to communicate why LGBTQ history matters and what we're doing to preserve and share our past."

The time and expertise donated by working group members make it possible to meet the increasing demand for our programs and services. The fire that drives these groups is the chance to make a difference by working to protect, document and share our rich history and culture. If you might be interested in getting involved, write to info@glbthistory.org (indicate "Working Group Query" in the subject line).

Terry Beswick is executive director for the GLBT Historical Society.

In the Archives

Documenting American Indian Organizing



by Gerard Koskovich

Regarded as the first organization of its kind, Gay American Indians (GAI) was established in San Francisco in 1975 at the height of gay liberation. Founded by Barbara Cameron (1954-2002) and Randy Burns, GAI initially was a social club for queer American Indians who often felt unwelcome in the LGBTQ community due to prejudice and in American Indian organizations due to homophobia. The group went on to

reclaim tribal traditions honoring two-spirit people who embraced mixed gender identities and roles.

The archives of the GLBT Historical Society hold a small number of collections of organizational records and personal papers documenting GAI and other two-spirit groups and individuals. Among the most significant:

- The [Randy Burns Papers](#), with a sampling of materials from 1968 through 2002 reflecting Burns' activism as well the work of GAI and other LGBTQ American Indian organizations across North America. Topics include initiatives to uncover two-spirit history and to respond to the AIDS crisis in American Indian communities.
- The [Gay American Indian Records](#), consisting primarily of materials related to academic conferences in the 1990s where two-spirit activists asserted their own histories and identities in opposition to perspectives anthropologists had imposed on them.
- The [Will Roscoe and Gay American Indians Collection](#), which preserves further records of GAI from 1983 to 1991. Also included are

papers from historian Will Roscoe, a white ally who served as editor of *Living the Spirit: A Gay American Indian Anthology* (1988), which was compiled by GAI.

In addition, our **Periodicals Collection** includes a handful of scarce newsletters and zines reflecting American Indian experience, culture and organizing: *B.A.A.I.T-S: Newsletter of the Bay Area American Indian Two-Spirits* (2000); *Buffalo Hide* (1993); *Seasons: The Native American AIDS Prevention Center Quarterly* (1989-1991); and *Two-Spirit News* (1996).

To learn more about the GLBT Historical Society's collections on American Indians, search our [online archives catalog](#). We're committed to further documenting the history and culture of two-spirit people in Northern California; if you have materials you might wish to donate, email our managing archivist, [Joanna Black](#).

Gerard Koskovich is communications director at the GLBT Historical Society.

Upcoming Events

Exhibition Opening

Angela Davis: OUTspoken | In the Front Gallery



Friday, February 9

7:00-9:00 PM

The GLBT History Museum

4127 18th Street

\$5.00 | [Free for members](#)

A new exhibition drawing on rare posters and ephemera from the Lisbet Tellefsen collection will highlight the journey of black lesbian activist Angela Davis: from radical scholar, to political prisoner, to revolutionary icon, to public intellectual. Davis first came to public attention in the late 1960s. Her outspoken activism and organizing efforts attracted both harsh criticism and strong support, resulting in her becoming a globally recognized symbol of radical resistance. Today, Davis continues her political work, including challenging mainstream LGBTQ movements to see service in the armed forces and participation in marriage with a critical eye. Curated by Tellefsen and historian Amy Sueyoshi, "Angela Davis: OUTspoken" considers some of the roles Davis has played in the American political imaginary and explores the complexity and impact of her life across nearly half a century. Join the Facebook conversation [here](#).

History Talk

We'wha: The Life & Times of a Traditional Two-Spirit



Thursday, February 15

7:00-9:00 PM

The GLBT History Museum

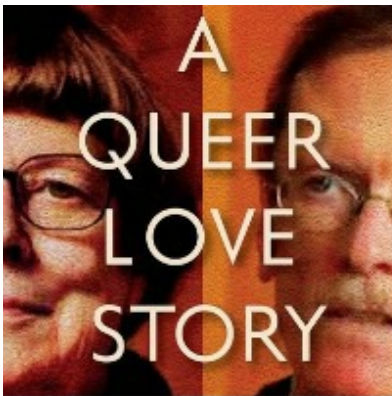
4127 18th St., San Francisco

\$5.00 | [Free for members](#)

In this illustrated talk, historian Will Roscoe will share the story of We'wha (1849-1896), a Zuni two-spirit who was a potter, weaver and leader of ceremonial activities for the tribe. Two-spirits in American Indian societies traditionally combined male and female roles and were recognized as belonging to a third gender. Perhaps the most celebrated of all two-spirits, We'wha even met United States President Grover Cleveland -- and is one of the individuals recognized on the Rainbow Honor Walk in San Francisco's Castro District. Roscoe is author of *The Zuni-Man Woman* (1991). The program is cosponsored by [Bay Area American Indian Two Spirits](#) (BAAITS), and representatives of the group will make a brief presentation after the talk.

Author Talk

A Queer Love Story: Jane Rule & Rick Bébout



Thursday, February 22

7:00-9:00 PM

The GLBT History Museum

4127 18th St., San Francisco

\$5.00 | [Free for members](#)

Marilyn Schuster will discuss and read from her new book, *A Queer Love Story: The Letters of Jane Rule and Rick Bébout* (2017), collecting the extraordinary correspondence of two leading figures in the queer history of Canada. Both were born in the United States: lesbian novelist Jane Rule, who grew up in Palo Alto and attended Mills College in Oakland, and gay journalist and AIDS activist Rick Bébout. According to the publisher, "*A Queer Love Story* presents the first 15 years of their correspondence. At turns poignant, scintillating and incisive, their exchanges include ruminations on queer life and the writing life as they document some of the most pressing LGBT issues and events of the 1980s and '90s, including HIV/AIDS, censorship, youth sexuality, public sex and S/M, Toronto's infamous bath raids, and state regulation of identity and desire." Join the Facebook conversation [here](#).

Community Forum

Fighting Back: Finding the Bisexual in LGBTQ



Wednesday, February 28

7:00-9:00 PM

The GLBT History Museum

4127 18th St., San Francisco

Free Admission | \$5.00 donation welcome

The latest in the our monthly "Fighting Back" series exploring contemporary queer issues in a historical context, "Finding the Bisexual in

LGBTQ" will offer a multigenerational conversation about the place of bisexual people in the larger LGBTQ community. A panel of historians, veteran organizers and younger activists will discuss bisexual representation, discrimination and activism in Bay Area LGBTQ organizing since the 1960s and how this history can inform today's resistance movements. Join the Facebook conversation [here](#).

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EXHIBITIONS & PROGRAMS

The GLBT History Museum

4127 18th St.

San Francisco, CA 94114

(415) 621-1107

www.glbthistory.org/museum

Monday & Wednesday - Saturday: 11:00 AM - 6:00 PM

Tuesday: Closed

Sunday: Noon - 5:00 PM

ARCHIVES & RESEARCH CENTER

The GLBT Historical Society

989 Market St., Lower Level

San Francisco, CA 94103-1708

(415) 777-5455

www.glbthistory.org/archives

Call to schedule a research appointment.

CREDITS: Bill Levay: Photo by Gerard Koskovich. Terry Beswick: Photo by **Gareth Gooch**. In the Archives: Gay American Indians contingent in the San Francisco Lesbian & Gay Freedom Day Parade (1988); photo: Michael Schols. OUTspoken: Detail of "Free Angela and All Political Prisoners" (1971); poster from the Lisbet Tellefsen collection. We'wha: Photograph of We'Wha Weaving (circa 1880); courtesy United States National Archives & Records Administration. Queer Love Story: Courtesy University of British Columbia Press. Fighting Back: BI-Pol contingent in the San Francisco Lesbian & Gay Freedom Day Parade (1984); photo: Arlene Kranz.

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