

Out on the Left Coast: San Diego LGBTQ History

Anna Culbertson
Special Collections Librarian, San Diego State University

Lisa Lamont
Digital Collections Librarian, San Diego State University

Proposal

The San Diego State University (SDSU) Library is collaborating with the Lambda Archives of San Diego to create an online interactive image and sound resource documenting the emergence of LGBTQ social movements in the San Diego and Northern Baja California region. *OUT on the Left Coast: San Diego LGBTQ History* will use San Diego Pride as an initial focal point. The moving and provocative graphics of the Pride phenomenon, including t-shirts, posters, buttons and banners, will be combined with photographs and oral histories of early community activists. The original materials for the project date from the late 1960s to the present and are housed at the Lambda Archives of San Diego, one of the best-maintained collections of LGBTQ history in the country. The project will be the basis for a larger collection of LGBTQ resources from Lambda and SDSU archives, and will expand to include donations from the community, also. The resulting collaboration will be a website and discovery tool to provide unprecedented public access to this important historical collection. This paper will discuss the progress of the project to date including the technology, the challenges of the collaborative effort, and most importantly the invaluable materials included. This project was made possible in part by a grant from the California Humanities Community Stories program.

Introduction

OUT on the Left Coast: San Diego LGBTQ History is a forthcoming online interactive image and sound resource documenting the emergence of LGBTQ social movements in the San Diego and Northern Baja California region. Using San Diego Pride as our entrypoint, the San Diego State University Library and the Lambda Archives of San Diego have been awarded funding to document and preserve local and regional LGBTQ history. The original materials for the project, including t-shirts, posters, buttons, banners, photographs and oral histories of early community activists, date from the late 1960s to the present and are housed at the Lambda Archives. Our goal is to create an online discovery tool to provide unprecedented public access to this important historical collection. The website will be launched in summer of 2017, ideally during San Diego Pride. We envision using this website as a foundation upon which to add more content, creating a growing and evolving resource to foster greater community understanding and engagement with this significant part of Southern California history. This paper documents the project to date, focusing first on the grant-writing experience and considerations of the

project in the broader context of its value to humanities scholarship, and then describing progress thus far and remaining steps.

Impetus

When we embarked on writing the grant for this project in 2015, we recognized that our efforts took place during a year that marked a monumental victory in the ongoing struggle for LGBTQ equality - the Supreme Court's decision to legalize same-sex marriage in the United States. California stakes an early claim in this history by becoming the second state to legally recognize same-sex domestic partnerships. Yet only half a century ago, Illinois was the first state to take steps towards the decriminalization of homosexual acts. When the Stonewall Inn, a licensed gay bar in New York City's Greenwich Village and now a national monument, was raided by police in 1969, riots ensued, marking a turning point for the modern gay liberation movement. These events were commemorated the following year by a march that drew national attention and ushered in a new tradition of annual Pride marches all over the country. San Diego's first Pride event was held in 1974 by a community group that had established a Center for Social Services in San Diego's Golden Hill neighborhood. The event included an informal, unpermitted march from the Center to the city's cultural epicenter, Balboa Park, and back. The following year, a permitted march of around 400 people marked the beginning of an annual Pride parade that has taken place every year, without fail, in the beautiful city of San Diego.

Counted among the people involved in the formative years of San Diego Pride are two men whose preservation efforts have now made it possible to share this moment in Southern California history. Jess Jessop, a Vietnam veteran and alumnus of San Diego State University, was a community supporter and political organizer whose tireless activism helped shape in large part San Diego's vocal acceptance of the LGBTQ community. Over the years, Doug Moore, a minister, community activist, and long-time Pride leader, compiled a massive collection of Pride-related items like posters, buttons, t-shirts, programs, banners, and photos. Jessop and Moore assembled these materials and others to establish the Lesbian and Gay Archives of San Diego, now known as the Lambda Archives of San Diego. Today, the collections form an amazing account of San Diego Pride history that illustrates an important milestone in the power of demonstration.

By the time we began to pursue the grant that would fund this project, we had already been strategizing a collaboration with Lambda Archives, both parties having recognized the many mutual benefits of a partnership. We were in agreement that a cross-organizational digital resource was our ideal goal, since Lambda is not currently able to invest in its own digital asset management (DAM) system and SDSU library seeks unique resources to support its relatively new LGBT Studies degree. Since the funding maximum for the grant was modest - at \$10,000 -

we agreed that we would need to focus our efforts on showcasing a specific collection. We knew the chosen collection would need to pack a powerful punch in terms of its historical significance in order to satisfy the requirements of the funding agency. Lambda's collection of San Diego Pride materials, some of which had already been digitized, seemed like the most logical starting point. We were in agreement that a website with coordinated social media and promotional efforts would make this foundational piece of San Diego LGBTQ history accessible to the broadest audience possible. In order to encourage multimodal forms of learning, we decided that the site should combine the visual experience of browsing the colorful array of Pride materials assembled by Jessop, Moore, and others, with the opportunity to interact with personal narratives. Lambda is run by a working board of activists and as such, is an invaluable resource for community involvement within an extensive network of willing participants. Between oral histories sponsored by Lambda and their expertise in engaging additional interview subjects, we are better able to complete the story of San Diego Pride by including the voices of the community that made it happen. We seek to communicate what it means and how it feels to not conform to mainstream ideas of sexuality and gender, and use these experiences to build a greater understanding of how California has come to be distinguished by its unique reputation for inclusivity.

California Council for the Humanities is an independent non-profit partner of the National Endowment for the Humanities whose mission is "to connect Californians to ideas and one another in order to understand our shared heritage and diverse cultures, inspire civic participation, and shape our future."¹ Our institution had been successfully funded by CCH for a different project in the past and, being very satisfied with the results, our administration was eager to appeal to the funding agency with a new project. CCH seeks to support projects that promote and preserve the humanities with a view toward the betterment of California through the creation of "a state of open mind."² We were humbled to find that our project aligned with their current vision so well as to have been awarded funding. The process was newly competitive in its most recent cycle, both at the internal level - we were selected as the one application to represent the campus through a white paper process - and at the actual grant application level - 20 out of 109 applications (18%) were funded in this cycle.

A Digital Resource for Humanists

CCH requires strong evidence of the humanities output that a funded project will generate. We are, of course, easily able to situate the early development of the LGBTQ movement at the center of numerous humanities-based inquiries. The influence of post-World War II youth on American society and culture has been well-documented. In particular, California's notably large baby

¹ "Our Mission," CalHum.org, last modified 2016, <http://www.calhum.org/about/our-mission>

² Ibid.

boomer population initiated many key political, social, and cultural moments of the postwar period, ranging from the Berkeley Free Speech Movement and the hippies of Haight Ashbury to a growing surf culture on the beaches of southern California and the Vietnam War Moratorium marches. The air was thick with ideas of radical social transformation throughout the 1960s and early 1970s.

Yet while a tangible paradigm shift eventually allowed for peaceful demonstrations to be tolerated by law enforcement, the early days of the LGBTQ movement, like the Civil Rights Movement before it, were met with crushing resistance. Even in liberal California, the earliest support for San Diego LGBTQ community members in crisis came in the form of an anonymous phone line answered from a utility closet in 1971.³ Understanding the social and cultural landscape of that time is critical to appreciating both the accomplishments of the LGBTQ movement today and the *courage* activists displayed in organizing these early events. Pride organizers across our country challenged traditional American ideals by taking to the streets to publicly celebrate a silenced and marginalized culture. Moreover their willingness to organize these events exemplifies the spirit of a generation that felt empowered enough to mobilize. These stories deepen our understanding of the significance of the Supreme Court decision in 2015 and contribute towards a more accurate and complete American history. And now, in light of the tragic events in Orlando in June of this year, we must not only insist on casting a light on the history and the victories of the LGBTQ community, but we must also actively support a leadership and legislation that prevent such tragedies from happening again. It is our responsibility.

Many marginalized populations have been disserved by history, owing in part to a lack of formal and recognized documentation. This project could not come at a more critical point in time, if for no other reason but the need to gather and preserve as many stories as possible while participants are still alive to document this era. Much of the early community has already been lost to AIDS-related illnesses in addition to age, including Jess Jessop (1939-1990). In addition, while many groups are able to pass stories down through children and grandchildren, individuals in this community, particularly of this generation, are less likely to have descendants with whom to share these stories. Oral histories are an important and often overlooked primary source format for humanities scholarship.

In addition to identifying oral histories to be conducted and/or collected, a thorough and ongoing survey of related primary and secondary sources enables us to contextualize the story through all of its documents. The project directors, Culbertson and Lamont, are both librarians who

³ This phone line, staffed by Jess Jessop and a small group of others, would become the Center for Social Services, later the San Diego LGBTQ Community Center, a well-established major resource for LGBTQ support today: <http://www.thecentersd.org/>

specialize in humanities-based research methodologies. We have also hired a research assistant who splits her time between archival research at Lambda and metadata work. Our humanities advisors, both faculty in the LGBT Studies program on campus, are invaluable resources for advice and background, as well as to help us situate local people and events within the larger history of the LGBTQ community.

The temptation to describe this project as a resource for digital humanities scholarship is difficult to resist, but it is important to think of its intended audience in more open and inclusive terms. As a multimedia resource available for use by scholars in a relatively young program on our campus (LGBT Studies), it undoubtedly poses unique opportunities for the curation, visualization and analysis of a piece of a much larger, important and under-documented history. A major potential audience for this project, however, is the Southern California community. This includes high school students, college students, educators and members of the community. It includes anyone who would benefit from the opportunity to contextualize contemporary issues in identity politics through this important historical moment. It also includes those members of the community who were a part of the movement, seeking to remember their own history and finally see it celebrated in their lifetimes. The resource will also be useful to the greater research community based not only in California, but also nationally. Our campus research emphasis on “Digital Humanities and Global Diversity” was implemented to explore the impact of the digital on diverse populations and make access to the resources and technologies dominated by privileged academics available to underrepresented and disadvantaged communities. In a word, as we witness more and more efforts within the digital humanities field at embracing such goals, we feel more at ease with that characterization.

What’s Done, What’s Next

Now we’ll discuss our progress to date, as well as what’s left to do. Since having been awarded the funds in January of 2016, Culbertson has overseen the grant’s administration needs and continues to communicate regularly with the Research Foundation on budget and time reporting issues. The grant carries a 1:1 cost-sharing requirement, in both cash and in-kind contributions, which we estimate we will have met by 200% at the end of the project. Lambda is primarily responsible for contributing staff time towards the archival research and metadata, which is an important point when considering a collaboration with a community non-profit archive. The nature of these organizations is not often such that they are easily able to meet major academic institutions in the middle when collaborating on grant requirements. This is not to say that they are not pulling their weight; indeed, the true value of their involvement lies in the ability to benefit from their expertise and the amazing materials they own, as well as the opportunity to help them provide access, and the community connections that we will have activated during this

project. We absolutely view the collaboration as symbiotic, and look forward to working with future content from the archive's amazing collections.

In addition to administration needs, Culbertson has also arranged and hired the research assistant, and supervises her on-site and remote work. The research assistant has also been trained on metadata entry by Lamont and the department's metadata specialist. She is currently dividing her time between metadata work, archival research at Lambda, and developing promotional material. We have organized several related events, including a traveling photography exhibit and two guest lectures to take place in the fall, and the research assistant is working with the library's marketing director to promote them.

While our hope is to build on the San Diego Pride story making the site an interactive storytelling experience about San Diego/regional LGBTQ history overall, we believe the Pride story stands alone as an amazing digital document. Together with Lambda staff, we have already been working to identify all early Pride history materials to be included in the project. Our goal is to conclude the research and creation of website text by the end of 2016, with final edits in place no later than the end of January 2017, in time to begin adding content to the site.

Lamont and the Digital Projects department have already begun preparing the content files. Although some of the content has already been digitized or photographed we have identified over 2,300 items that need digital imaging and descriptions, as well as at least 7 pre-existing oral histories that need transcriptions to enable full-text searching. T-shirts, buttons and banners need to be photographed and posters require large-format scanning. The duration of this phase of the project is expected to be between 2-3 months (approx 516 hours of work), and we anticipate completion by the end of 2016. The digital materials and accompanying metadata will be stored in the library's DAM, iBase. The DAM is searchable through internet search engines as well as through its own interface. Potential users will have several points of access: through the DAM, through Google and through the "Out on the Left Coast" website.

We also hope to work with Lambda's oral historians to incorporate further interviews as more participants are recorded, and it is expected that those participants will help us identify others. Their focus on oral history projects is current and ongoing, so as related narratives are identified, we can easily include them on the website. The LGBTQ community served by Lambda includes a close-knit network that provides tremendous crowd-sourcing potential for identifying people, places and events. Lambda president Maureen Steiner has indicated that she will engage community historians to help us organize the story.

In fall of 2016, we will begin planning for the website. This will require all project personnel, including the Lambda archivist, to meet, finalize content (both original and digital), and build the

story. With the help of our humanities advisors and community historians, we will begin clustering content into cohesive story components and organizing narrative descriptions developed from the research phase. In the late fall of 2016, we will identify platforms for the website design and choose one. We're currently looking at Omeka and WordPress in addition to having the site custom-built. By January 2017, we will finalize a contract with a designer and begin populating the site with content and text.

We expect the site to be ready for launch by the end of spring 2017, so that its introduction can coincide with two crucial outreach opportunities to the project: LGBTQ Pride Month in June and San Diego Pride in July. We plan to attend sponsored events during those months and solicit community participation and support. San Diego Pride weekend in July will also serve as the perfect point at which to hold our launch reception, which will be co-sponsored by Lambda and potentially involve San Diego's Diversionary Theatre, which is located in the same building as Lambda and serves as a major venue for cultural engagement of the LGBTQ community. SDSU annually maintains a presence in the San Diego Pride Parade and we intend to reach out to the Diversity Office to incorporate promotion of the new site into that representation.

In the fall of 2017, public lectures will utilize themes focusing on outreach/audience participation, the historical significance of early Pride events, and community reflections and reactions. We envision some of the programming taking place at Lambda, as this will bring the broadest audience, but we aim to reach the LGBTQ community on SDSU campus as well, which is among the top 20 LGBTQ-friendly universities in the country. This includes undergraduates that are new to Southern California, have recently come out and/or are simply interested in this aspect of San Diego history. We consider this generation one of our most important audience demographics, in terms of fostering historical awareness. Our humanities advisors will be instrumental in tying the programming to undergraduate and graduate courses satisfying General Education and LGBTQ degree requirements at SDSU.

In addition, we will focus heavily on social media to promote the project. We plan to prepare social media outlets beginning in February 2017 and start promotion early, during the website creation phase, to generate interest and anticipation in advance of its launch. We will use Facebook and Twitter to announce important achievements in the development of the website and to send out photos and information. We will use Tumblr and possibly Snapchat to share images and video clips with more detailed descriptions and to promote events. As the development is completed, all of these social media outlets will allow our audience to interact with us and amongst themselves. We can engage with the users and promote discussion and sharing, developing our project further based on feedback in this way.

Evaluation and Wrap-Up

Continual review will focus on a well-rounded assessment of the website. Google Analytics will supply data on the number of visitors, the number of pageviews and the length of time visitors remain on the site. Database reports will list the keywords users are searching, the success of their searches and the most viewed materials. We can use those results to then alter the metadata so that users are successful in navigating the site and the materials. Additionally, the website will include an online survey asking viewers about the usability, quality and value of the materials, as well as suggestions for new materials or stories to add to the site. We will also use comment software to enable viewers to offer feedback on the materials or make suggestions. All the data will be compiled and used to enhance and further develop the site.

Statistics gathered from each of the social media platforms will enable us to continually evaluate the website content, as well as engage in conversations with our audience and gather their thoughts on the project. As the website will be a rich ongoing historical resource for viewers, we also hope and expect that the project will uncover more related stories and inspire the addition of more materials and collaborations. We will plan the site's design with this type of future growth in mind. The university has a strong commitment to the preservation of its digital assets, and this project will be maintained accordingly.

Attendance at physical events will be counted. We will record social media and blog interactions relating to the lecture series as well. Anecdotal observations from library employees will be solicited and, most importantly, we will seek feedback in the form of telephone interviews from the oral history subjects - early Pride participants and community activists. Assessment of the project personnel's experiences will contribute a unique picture of the educational value of engaging with the materials at a research-intensive level. In addition to meeting regularly to evaluate and maintain progress, we must also complete a comprehensive final evaluation and report. We will compile and analyze statistical data relating to both the website and the lecture series and gather summary information for each of the project phases to compile the final report, which we are required to submit no later than December 2017.

While it's hard to fully visualize the end result at this point, we are excited to unveil the site, evaluate its impact, and pursue additional content and funding. We anticipate an ongoing resource for which we can facilitate additional collaborations with other nonprofits, archives, museums and library collections in Southern California. We are grateful for the opportunity to present our progress to date and welcome any feedback, comments, or questions.