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Buffalo-Niagara LGBTQ History Project Minutes

Madeline Davis Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual,
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Buffalo-Niagara LGBTQ History Project Monthly Meeting - Dec. 8, 2016

Dramatis Personae: Adrienne, Ana, Marielle, Brigitte, Hope, Liz, Nissa

First of all: Shout-out to all of the new members who showed up this month, and who have some awesome skill sets to bring to what we do. Hope is an archivist who works with Dan DiLandro at the Madeline Davis Archives. She's got some projects of her own in which she would like us to participate--more about that below. Brigitte is an archivist, too, who works at the Burchfield-Penney, and who also works with refugee populations. Nissa comes to us after coming to our screening of *Swimming with Lesbians*(!!!!). Her background is in administrative work, and has agreed to help lend her expertise to some of our archive digitization work (again, more about that below). Welcome, Hope, Brigitte, and Nissa!

Digitizing Archives: How's that going?

First things first: Thumbs-up to **Liz**, who has agreed to plan our monthly Party in the Archives from here on out. If you have an idea for a public or private archive to explore, bring it to Liz, and she will hook it up!

We (well, mostly Ana) talked about the status of our archive digitization project:

- Scanning of physical archives has begun (more about that later). Although most of it has been done at UB, where Ana and Chris have access to high-quality scanners, the History Project now owns a portable scanner, which currently resides at Adrienne and Ana's house. Adrienne also has a scanner for her own personal use, that isn't very portable (or very fast at scanning, for that matter), but which she is willing to lend to the cause. Nissa also has a scanner at home, which she would be willing to let us use to digitize archives.
- Carol Speser, as most of the group knows, has a HUGE private archive, encompassing several rooms in her house. It's taken some time, but Carol is now ready for us to start digitizing her archives, in order to facilitate their donation to the Madeline Davis Archives. In fact, Ana and Chris have already begun the process of digitizing Carol's archives: they recently finished scanning the entire run of Gay and Lesbian Community Network newsletters, which spanned from the late 1980s to the early 1990s. They are about to start on *Pride Path*, a local LGBTQ magazine that Carol and her partner Joan produced in the early 1990s.

While it's great that we've started the process of digitization, there is, as previously mentioned, a TON of stuff--Chris and Ana can't do it alone. Ana and Liz proposed that we take a bunch of stuff from Carol's private archive, take it to Adrienne and Ana's place (they just live around the corner from Carol), and have some sort of scanning and labor division party.

- The other two personal archives that should be on our radar belong to Camille Hopkins and Ari Moore. Both have given their consent for us to digitize their archives.

Camille's is a greater priority for us at present, as she is planning to move back to the Pacific Northwest this summer.

As mentioned above, two of the new members present this month are archivists by profession. They asked us some questions about the nuts and bolts of digitization, and gave us some helpful guidelines:

- We are still thinking about file storage. Carol wants to have an external hard drive full of files, while Ana would like to look into cloud storage. Eventually, of course, we want to put archival material on our webpage. For the time being, though, we will start with cloud storage, until we take up too much space. Nissa has some storage we can use.
- Per Hope's instructions: we should use our scanners for documents and images. We should not use our scanners to digitize buttons and t-shirts. Hope has the setup for that, if need be (and more about that below).
- Scanning materials is usually not sufficient--typically, they have to be edited (usually in Photoshop) to look nice. This is something Nissa can help out with--she can do some work in Adobe suite.
- MAKE SURE ALL THE FILES HAVE THE SAME FORMAT AND RESOLUTION. Ana will check the format and resolution of what we have already scanned, but in general, Brigitte recommends using tiff format--it's a heavier, highly editable format, which can be converted to jpeg format later. We should shoot for 2 MBs per file.
- Files should be named in a standardized way.
- Digitized archival material should also have metadata attached to it. This is something Brigitte is going to train Nissa to do.

With all that in mind, this is what the next couple months of archive digitizing is going to look like:

- Ana and Chris are going to work with Carol to identify bigger pieces of her personal archive that we can prepare for digitization. We will then bring those pieces of the archive back to Ana and Adrienne's place. On **Friday, December 30 at 5 p.m.**, there will be a meeting at Adrienne and Ana's place, where we will divide the labor, and maybe even start digitizing on site. Hope will make a handout with guidelines for us, and Brigitte will be on site to make sure we do it right.
- Camille is next on our radar. Liz will work with Camille to set up a date to head to Camille's place to research and possibly digitize some archival material. No specific date on that yet, but that will probably take place around **January 13 or 14**.
- We will set up a date to digitize Ari's archives in the near but unspecified future.

Wearing Gay History Digitization Project

In her capacity as an archivist at Buff State/the Madeline Davis Archives, Hope is working on something called the Wearing Gay History Digitization Project, and she would like our help-- and our t-shirts.

The details of the project: Hope is working on digitizing t-shirts that commemorate LGBTQ organizations and events. T-shirts are a *crucial* historical resource for the LGBTQ community, because in cultures and eras in which the mainstream media has declined to keep a record of LGBTQ events, and concerted efforts have sometimes been made to drive any historical record of LGBTQ existence underground, t-shirts are often the only evidence we have that an event took place.

At present, the Madeline Davis Archives have a collection of about 150 shirts, commemorating events that took place from the 1970s to about 2012. About 140 of these shirts have been digitized. Now, Hope is looking for community members to donate shirts for inclusion the project. In addition to being searchable on the [Madeline Davis Archives website](#), Hope is partnering with a number of other LGBTQ archives across the nation. Within the next couple of weeks, local t-shirts should appear on the [Wearing Gay History](#) website, as well as at the [Digital Transgender Archive](#).

Hope has already asked Carol about her t-shirts, and Carol says that she will donate her shirts after they are used for a fundraiser in July. In the meantime, we are asked to donate our own t-shirts, and/or to pass the call for shirts on to people we know. (And yes, Hope is also looking for shirts that come from locales other than Buffalo, and/or national organizations.)

For more information, contact Hope at dunbarhm@buffalostate.edu.

Website and Social Media Update

Once again, shout out to **Liz**, who has agreed to turn the tangled mess that is our social media presence into a streamlined machine. First step: consolidating pages. Liz's #1 concern at this point is that we have both a [public page](#) and a [semi-private Working Group page](#) on Facebook. We aren't consistent about which we use, and people who are trying to find us on social media may be confused about how best to reach us.

Liz's suggestion: that we phase out the Working Group, and start using the public page exclusively. Liz will talk to **Bridge** about this, and will give **Carolyn** admin status on the public page so that she can start posting meeting invites from the public page. As of yet, we have no clear timeline for when the working group will be phased out, but once that's happened, Liz will start updating the public page regularly with, as she says, "cool history stuff."

As for the rest of us: We can help Liz out by getting permission to publicly post any interesting archival materials we find. We can then start sending them to the History Project's e-mail address (bflolgbtghistory@gmail.com), so that Liz can start posting.

Queer Places, Practices, and Lives Conference

The [Queer Places, Practices, and Lives Conference](#) is a conference held every other year or thereabouts at Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio. It is super fun, and this year, Miss Major is scheduled to make an appearance. Although they are mostly a scholar/grad student conference, they have expressed an interest in, and openness to, presentations by activists who are not university affiliated.

Initially, Adrienne was invited by someone forming a panel for the conference to write a brief paper about the History Project, to present on that panel. However, Ana and Liz have also expressed interest in presenting on the History Project at the conference. After talking amongst ourselves, and conferring with the planners of the conference, we have decided to submit our own separate panel, entirely about the History Project and the importance of Rust Belt/regional queer histories, in which multiple members will present on different facets of our work.

The abstract is due **Friday, December 16**, so people who are interested in being a part of the conference panel should plan to attend a brief meeting at Liz's house on **Sunday, December 11 at 10 a.m.**

NEH Media Projects Grants

Ana found an announcement that the National Endowment for the Humanities is accepting applications for [production and development grants](#) for film, television, and radio projects. She brought it to us, thinking we could perhaps apply for funding for the work we want to do with trans activists, or perhaps even with LGBTQ refugees.

The grant is due **January 11, 2017**. As most of us have backgrounds in applications for research funding, we thought (naively, perhaps) that we could write the grant in time. Hope and Brigitte, who are more experienced with grant writing, are skeptical, and say that such grants typically take about 6 months to write. Regardless of that fact, group members expressed an opinion that it might be good for us to at least practice articulating our work to prepare for writing grants, and if we can't get a grant in by January, to start preparing for the next funding cycle. Group members agreed to go to the NEH website, read the requirements in more detail, and discuss at a later date--perhaps on Sunday--how to approach the issue.

Refugee Project

At the end of our October meeting, when we first talked about putting this project together, we agreed to start reaching out to our contacts in Buffalo's assorted refugee committees to see if anyone: a) would be interested in collaborating in this project with us, or in telling their stories; b) had any ideas about what form the final product should take; c) wanted to work on some kind of event to connect LGBTQ and refugee populations, so that stories could be shared and exchanged.

Just to review, those assignments were as follows:

- **Sara:** Reach out to friends in Nepali and Somali communities.
- **Marek:** Reach out to Ali (colleague) and Buff State contacts.
- **Katz:** Reach out to GLYS and Lafayette High School.
- **Adrienne:** Talk to a contact in the Burmese community.

Update on those assignments: Adrienne talked to her Burmese contact, who in turn gave her the contact info of an LGBTQ-identified Burmese refugee. He may be able to introduce us to more LGBTQ Burmese refugees. Unfortunately, she and this person have yet to contact directly, but that is on her priority list for the upcoming week. Sara has not yet been able to reach out to her contacts. No update as of yet on Marek's or Katz's outreach.

Brigitte, as previously mentioned, teaches English to local refugees. Based on her experiences, she expressed some skepticism that LGBTQ refugees would be willing to talk to us--particularly since, in some cases, they may fear ostracism or violence for speaking out. She suggested that we bring LGBTQ refugees in for collaboration by casting a wider net, so to speak--perhaps by asking refugee artists, without specifying sexuality or gender identity, to collaborate with us. She will talk to her supervisor Doreen about the project, to get further suggestions and perhaps set up a partnership.

We also talked about some of the ethical concerns that might underlay a project involving LGBTQ refugees:

- Avoid a narrative that exploits refugees and reduces them to their traumas. Tell a multifaceted and more holistic story.
- Release forms will be important in eliciting consent. We talked about adopting our release forms for trans oral histories to this project. As with the trans project, we want to give refugees options for how their stories will be recorded, and whether or not we disguise their identity in any way. We also want to give them some control over what questions they are asked.
- We've talked a bit about translation--and Sara may have talked about having contacts during the October meeting. But making sure we have everything in community members' preferred languages is something we should think about sooner rather than later.

Speaker Event: Anne Balay

A couple weeks ago, Adrienne and Ana (and friend of the project Tanja) went to the American Studies Association conference. While there, they met [Anne Balay](#), author of the book *Steel Closets*, which tells the story of LGBTQ steelworkers in the Rust Belt (in particular, northwestern Indiana). We would like to bring Anne to Buffalo to talk about her work, because: a) she speaks from a political/identity intersection that very few people talk about, but that is *very* relevant to what we do (queerness, the Rust Belt, working class identity, and workers' issues/economic justice); b) Anne's work complicates the New Diverse

America Versus the Rust Belt narrative that has cropped up in the media since Trump assumed the presidency; c) we want to create spaces for LGBTQ people in Buffalo to think intersectionally and talk across differences (in this case, class difference).

Anne, for her part, would love to come to Buffalo, and has requested that we plan an event for February. Initially, Adrienne had been talking with someone from the Wellness Center at UB and with the Dyke March planning committee about creating a speaker double-feature in February with [Eli Clare](#), who is scheduled to be here the week of the 25th. The UB Wellness Center, however, has decided not to collaborate, so that will not happen. We will go it on our own, and we are hoping to work with some local unions and/ or an LGBTQ union group called Pride @ Work to create an event where local workers supplement Anne's work with their own stories.

The problem here, as you may have guessed, is money. For her part, Anne has said she'll drive here (she lives in Pennsylvania) and rent a cheap AirBnB room (Ana and Adrienne might be able to talk her into using the spare bedroom of their apartment). She's also been evasive about honorariums, saying that we should just ask around, see what we can scrounge up, and get back to her. But: a) we would like to give her a generous honorarium, as she currently works as an adjunct; b) we have less than \$200 in our coffers now, and we certainly can't ask her to come here for that little. We will need to think about fundraising, and partnering with other, more moneyed organizations to make this happen.

Here, then, is our plan for the next couple of weeks:

- **Ana:** Talk to Leslie Lohman Art Museum, UB Gender Institute, and UB Graduate Student Association.
- **Adrienne:** See if the Dyke March planning committee is still into this event, sans Eli Clare, and will contribute some money. Look into Pride @ Work and local unions. Talk to Kirk of Coalition for Economic Justice, who has expressed some interest in supporting this event.
- **Nissa:** Look into the possibility of tabling/raising funds at Ambush.

Trans Committee Updates

There was no committee meeting in November, but there will be one on **Sunday, December 11 at Grindhaus at 3 p.m.** Nothing else to report at this time.

POC Committee Updates

Marielle, head of the POC Committee, invites History Project folks to come to the next committee meeting, which is on **Thursday, December 15 at 6 p.m. at Spot Coffee on Elmwood**. The committee is working on an event centered on Buffalo's ball culture, which will hopefully go up for Black History Month. The committee is looking for videos or other

visuals to show for this event, and maybe even some live performances. To that end, Hope agreed to look for possible resources in the Madeline Davis Archives.

The committee is in the process of finding and reaching out to contacts who could help with this event. Marielle has gotten in contact with Savion from DOPE Collective, who in turn gave Marielle a possible contact from MOCHA Center. Marielle has also been trying to reach out to Ari Moore, but she had the wrong e-mail address (Ana gave her the right one). We talked about reaching out to Nola Trotter, as well--perhaps she knows people involved in local ball culture.

We also talked about likely venues for such an event--perhaps Dreamland, Underground, the Colored Musicians Club, or the venue on Bailey where Leaving our Legacy was just held. Ana and Adrienne will look into the Colored Musicians Club.

Next Meeting

THERE WILL BE NO END OF DECEMBER MEETING, as many of us will be out of town, celebrating holidays, recovering from holidays, etc. The next monthly meeting will be **Thursday, January 26**. However, as mentioned above, there will be plenty of other events happening in the interim, and Adrienne will definitely be checking in with folks in the intervening month and a half to see if they need help completing some of the tasks they've committed to.

For the next meeting, we desperately need to start talking funding and structure. The stuff we want to do costs money, and we need to figure out how we're going to raise funds. Questions we need to seriously ponder include:

- Should we apply for 501c3 status? What are the pros and cons of this?
- If yes, what do we need to realistically do to gain 501c3 status? If no, what other funding structures are available to us?
- How should we raise money for all the stuff we want to do?

Please to be pondering and researching this for January's meeting. Thanks!