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Buffalo-Niagara LGBTQ History Project Minutes

Madeline Davis Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual,
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May 2018; Buffalo-Niagara LGBTQ History Project Minutes

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Buffalo-Niagara LGBTQ History Project

May 8, 2018

Meeting Minutes

Dramatis Personae: Tanja, Dani, Michael, Nissa, Phoebe, Christine, Ana, Adrienne, Brigitte, Bridget, Amanda

First meeting after Black in Time! We had three--three!--new attendees, so we spent the first half of the meeting giving an overview of what we do, and gauging member interest in our various projects. We then spent the second half brainstorming for our next two events--a *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold* community read, and a collaboration with UB's Global Gender and Sexuality Studies department.

Our simple goal is to have a meeting for each project within the next month. Our complex goals... well, are more complex. Read on!

Website Building and Digital Archiving:

Brigitte, Archivist Extraordinaire, graciously opened up the meeting by giving an overall explanation of our digital archiving project, and by talking about next steps for both archiving and website-building.

The new, Omeka-hosted website is still on target to be launched on the Summer Solstice. Brigitte and Melissa will be holding a closed meeting this coming Sunday, to start putting that together. They will also be putting together a YouTube channel for the group, where we can start hosting some of Dani's film footage.

The group mentioned that we had held scanning parties in the past to digitize archival material and stamp it with metadata, and Tanja expressed interest in holding another scanning party. Brigitte and other members of the group expressed some reservation about this. First, scanning parties have been traditionally held at Adrienne and Ana's house on a "bring-your-own-scanner" basis, and they have been haphazard, as there's a learning curve to getting things scanned correctly. Second, Brigitte felt that it was only logistically possible for her to teach scanning procedure, metadata stamping, etc. to about 3-4 people at a time.

We spent some time discussing ways of working around these difficulties. Tanja mentioned that another group she works with, Madwomen in the Attic, held a scanning party not too long ago by taking over a room at the UB library. She would be willing to set this up for us, if we're interested. Brigitte mentioned that, although she only feels comfortable teaching the digitization process to a few people at a time, there are other types of work members could do at scanning parties--for instance, transcribing. We didn't come to a clear conclusion on these difficulties, but Brigitte and Tanja agreed to talk in more detail together about the logistics of this project, and see if they could come up with a viable way to make a scanning party happen.

Finally, we spent some time talking about the first archive exhibit we should put on our website. In the name of working smarter, not harder, Ana suggested that we put together an exhibit based on Black in Time--including photos from the event, Dani's film footage, and some of the photos and memorabilia on display. She mentioned, though, that we would have to confirm with donors that putting objects from their personal collections on the website was okay.

Group members interested in this project: Michael, Nissa, Tanja, Phoebe, Adrienne, Ana

Next Steps:

- **Brigitte, Melissa:** Meet on Sunday (May 13) to work on website
- **Brigitte, Tanja:** Meet and work out the logistics of a scanning party
- **Ana:** Confirm with Black in Time donors that we have their permission to post their photos and memorabilia to our website

Goals:

- Hold a scanning party between now and next monthly meeting (June 12)
- Launch website by Summer Solstice (June 21)

Future Filmmaking:

Dani led a discussion about the present and future of our filmmaking endeavors. Here, essentially, is where we are:

- We have 5 filmed interviews of trans activists done. At least 3 of them are either fully transcribed, or are in the process of being transcribed. Although we have some leads as to who else we could interview, Dani would like to pause and figure out what to do with the footage we have before we interview more people.
- In addition to the edited short films we showed at Black in Time, we have the unedited raw footage from our interviews. Dani would like to see those get transcribed, too, for potential use in future projects.
- A LOT of people from Buffalo's ballroom scene mentioned at Black in Time that they would like to be interviewed. The idea of creating something like *Paris is Burning*, except more Buffalo-centric, has been thrown around. Dani has also expressed interest in doing more filming around local ball culture.
- In general, Dani is looking for more queer media-makers to collaborate with, and is also interested in recruiting more people with an interest in filming--they can train up people without filming skills.

We spent some time talking about the ultimate format of our filming projects. From a political perspective, Dani wants to brainstorm ways to help the public let us decide how we're going to use our film footage. How can we create compelling art, while still being accountable to the communities who have allowed us to film them?

From an artistic perspective: for a long time, the History Project has talked about turning our oral histories of trans activists into a documentary, but Dani points out that a documentary

may not be the best use of our footage. In fact, we never committed to creating a single documentary; in the beginning, we filmed trans activists as an act of faith, presuming that the act of filming would lead us to discover the best way to display our footage. It may be that a different format is a better fit for our footage.

Dani has a number of their own ideas about how we might use the footage, as well. Among other things, they suggested a series of short stories. We could either use the whole film footage, or even make something purely audio. They also expressed an interest in making a "Director's Cut" of the ball footage we showed at Black in Time--we could have established member of the ball scene commenting on the content of the footage, or telling stories over it.

In the end, the group realized that this was just the tip of a big brainstorming iceberg, and it was decided that a more in-depth meeting should be planned for those who are interested in the film project.

Group members interested in this project: Brigitte, Christine, Ana, Bridget, Adrienne, Tanja, Phoebe

Next steps/goals:

- **Dani:** Plan a meeting for the film project, between now and the next monthly meeting (June 12)
- **Literally anybody:** Help us transcribe our footage! If you're interested, talk to Dani, Ana, or Adrienne.

Raising Money:

As the History Project grows, the ambition of our projects grows--and so, in turn, does the amount of money it costs to put them together. We need to come up with a long-term fundraising plan, and a few group members with an interest in grant writing have decided to meet and make that plan.

Genia, Tanja, and Adrienne are meeting at Adrienne's house on **May 22 at 6 p.m.** in order to figure out a grant writing plan. Anyone else who is interested in helping is invited to come.

Group members interested in this project: Genia, Tanja, Adrienne, Phoebe, Michael

Next steps: Fundraising meeting at Adrienne's house (ask Adrienne for the address) on May 22 at 6 p.m.

Goals: Among other things, scoring some funding for our next event (see below).

EVENT BRAINSTORMING!!!!

At the beginning of this year, we set a goal of hosting 4 events in 2018. We are somewhat behind on this goal: our initial plan had been to host a first event in February or March, but

instead, Black in Time took place in April. Which means that we are only now beginning to plan our second event.

Enter Christine, who attended her first History Project meeting tonight and offered us another plan. Christine is a professor in the new Global Gender and Sexualities department at UB, as well as the director of the Queer Studies Research Workshop. She is currently planning a kickoff celebration (proposed theme: *Queer Histories, Queer Futures*) for the reconstitution of her department, which is close on the heels of the 50th anniversary of UB's Women's Studies program (one of the first in the country!). It also coincides with the 25th anniversary of the publication of *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold*--which, by happy coincidence, is the book that our next proposed event focuses on. The kickoff is tentatively planned for October 11 (National Coming Out Day) and 12, and Christine would like it to be a collaboration between UB and the History Project.

Which means that our event schedule for the year would look like this:

- Event 1: Black in Time, April 15
- Event 2: *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold* community read, complete with walking tours, speakers and other as-yet-undetermined awesome stuff, mid-late summer
- Event 3: Collaboration with UB that builds on, yet is slightly different from, our community read project, October 11-12
- Event 4: TBD, after October

In general, the group was enthusiastic about this idea. Folks affiliated with the university (in addition to Christine, Michael is a law professor at UB) like the idea of bringing an activist, non-academic perspective to UB. Amanda expressed the opinion that our community read gets copies of *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold* in community members' hands, and its ideas in their heads, they may be more inclined to attend the events at the university--even those who are normally intimidated by academia. Nissa liked the idea of having a chance to try out something like a walking tour on one scale during the community read, and then adapting it to a different scale during the October event.

We spent a lot of time talking about accessibility--among other things, encouraging people to read *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold*, but not excluding those who for whatever reason couldn't read it. We also want to make sure this event is accessible to people with lots of different income and dis/ability levels. Here are some of the ideas we proposed:

- Budgeting some money so that people can get copies of the book for cheap, or for free, or perhaps on a sliding scale.
 - Christine offered to look into the money available to her, to see if UB could help fund this.
 - This will likely also be a focus of some of our grant writing on May 22.
 - We might be able to distribute printed copies of chapters at specific events--though there was some debate about the legality of this.
 - Asking people with higher incomes to "pay it forward"--that is, buy a book for someone who can't afford it.
- Looking for an audio version of the book, and if one doesn't exist, making one.

- Starting each community read event with a public reading. That way, those who have read the book will immediately perceive the connection between a given event and the book; and those who haven't read the book still have a way to anchor themselves in the book's concepts.
- Creating walking tours with folks who have mobility issues in mind. This might mean making the walk slow and gentle, or it might mean using some form of transportation other than walking. (Nissa suggested stealing one of those pedal bikes that take people on beer tours!)
- Creating a map, either online or in some app, that people can use to take a walking tour on their own time, even if they can't attend the walk on its scheduled day.
 - Bridge Rauch might know of suitable apps for this. Tanja and Amanda seemed to be familiar with possible online tools, as well.
- Holding more than one community read event, over a period of multiple days, so that people don't feel pressure to read the book all at once. Alternatively, having not one reading group, but several.

We spent some time brainstorming possible ideas, which may be part of the community read or the event at UB--we haven't assigned a specific date to any plan yet. These include a walking tour (everybody is excited about a walking tour), asking the authors of *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold* to speak, creating an interactive online map, putting up physical markers at important historical sites, putting out a Call for Work asking contemporary artists to make work in response to the book, and asking the Madeline Davis Archives to put together a curated exhibit of source material for the book. Christine says she would love help talking through what some of the events at UB should be, and History Project members agreed that both events should complement each other rather than cannibalizing one another.

But we did decide to start the community read with a kickoff event--or, as Michael called it, a birthday party for the book. It will take place in late June/early July--which means that we should be able to have publicity out in time for Pride weekend. Our hope is that this birthday party will include the following:

- We hope to talk the Madeline Davis Archives into letting us duplicate and display audio files from the original interviews conducted for the book, and to have listening stations for these files at the kickoff.
- A big map, showing locations of sites mentioned in the book.
- Books available for people who want to be involved in other community read events, as well as encouraging people with money to donate/pay for extra copies. (The idea of this kickoff/birthday party is that no one will have to read anything to participate in it, but that it will advertise subsequent events, and provide people with access to books if they don't have one already.)

- Phoebe runs a group of socially conscious singers, who would like to get more involved in the Buffalo community. Christine suggested that the group find the music for Madeline Davis' song, "Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold," after which the book is named, and sing it at the event.

Pulling this off--and in just a little under two months!-- is going to take A LOT of work on our part. So, here is a handy table of everything that needs to be done. We will catch up via group chat by the end of May to gauge everyone's progress.

The thing	The people doing the thing
Read <i>Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold</i> .	Everyone
Research and create map.	Nissa, Tanja, Christine
Figure out logistics for getting books in people's hands.	Christine, Amanda, Dani, Adrienne
Secure venue for event.	Ana, Amanda
Get audio files of interviews; try to figure out how to create listening booths.	Adrienne, Christine, Dani, Amanda. (Adrienne will ask Dan from Buff State about audio files, and include Christine in the emails.)
Brainstorm other days, themes, activities, etc. for community read.	Everyone