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August 2018; Buffalo-Niagara LGBTQ History Project Minutes

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Buffalo-Niagara LGBTQ History Project

August 14, 2018

Dramatis Personae: Adrienne, Bridge, Ana, Cory, Christy, Nicole, Moira, Collin, Amanda, Lydia, Cody

Walking Tour Logistics:

We began the meeting by hashing out the logistics of our *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold* walking tour. Initially, we discussed the possibility of some sort of biking apparatus--either attaching a cab to the back of a bike and transporting people that way, or renting one of those bike trolleys people use to go bar-hopping. Eventually, though, we hit on a solution we liked even better: the tour guides will remain stationary, and the tour-goers will take the tour at the pace they want, choosing to visit sites in the order they please (or not visit them at all).

It will work like this: tour-goers will be asked to begin their tour at a central starting point. Because of their proximity to the bar sites in the Fruit Belt, Bridge suggests we start at Evergreen Lofts, and Christy has agreed to reach out to Evergreen Lofts and ask for permission to use the site as a jumping-off point. Once there, tour-goers will pay the sliding scale fee, and will be given a badge that designates them as a member of the tour, and a passport for the tour. The passport will contain the map of the bar sites, a suggested route to walk (although participants are by no means required to follow that route), a list of performance times, and pages that will be stamped by tour guides once they reach the bar site. Cory has volunteered to begin work on passport design.

Cory biked the tour earlier this week, and estimates that it's about 3 miles in length. Christy estimates that such a tour will take about 3 hours to walk. Therefore, we will block out a 3-hour cluster of time for people to take tours. During that period, people will travel the tour at their own pace--possibly in the suggested order; possibly in a different order; possibly they'll only take a partial tour. We will assign tour guides to a site or cluster of sites, and they will stamp passports, provide historical context, and answer questions on demand. At the same time, each site or cluster of sites will have a performer attached to it. We don't want our performers to exhaust themselves by constantly having to perform on demand, so we will create a schedule of staggered performances. Each performer will perform at fixed times, maybe 2-3 times over the course of the tour. Christy will work on a spreadsheet dividing the tour into clusters which will make it easy for us to plug in tour guides and performers, and Collin and Moira will work out the performance schedule as we secure more performers.

This new way of designing the tour has implications. For starters, because the tour is now self-directed, and we're not going to have a single group of people following a lone tour guide, we can potentially invite A LOT more people on the tour. We didn't make any clear decisions about how many people should be invited on the tour, and one of the assignments to all group members between now and next week's meeting is to make a decision about how many people we want to allow to go on a single tour. Now that the tour is bigger, Christy can make a fancy registration portal on the Preservation Buffalo Niagara website, which will be easier for us to keep track of than a Google registration form.

Second, because the tour is now self-directed, and there are a lot more moving parts, we want to both push back and change the nature of the first tour. Instead of having a “soft opening” of our tour on Labor Day weekend, in which we invite a few select tour-goers with expertise, our first tour will be later in the month, and will be open to the general public. Our tour schedule will be as follows:

- Saturday, September 15 - 12-3pm
- Saturday, September 29 - 2-5pm
- Mid-October (TBD), as part of UB’s festivities. Adrienne needs to talk to Christine Varnado about whether/when they want us to do the tour.

Several members of the group expressed interest in holding an afterparty for the tour--preferably in a bar close to the sites people will be exploring. As it happens, Collin works at Marble + Rye, and suggested that we could ask them to open their doors to us for happy hour. They might even be willing to make specialized cocktails, and/or donate a dollar from every drink purchase to the History Project. Collin will ask Marble + Rye if they are interested in this arrangement later this week.

Because our first public tour is now just a month away(!!!), it is already time to start working on publicity. Adrienne agreed to draft a draft a press release and an email blast this week. (Reminder: any press and promotional materials for the event should name Humanities NY, Preservation Buffalo Niagara, and possibly Marble + Rye and Evergreen Lofts.)

Finally: Bridge reminded us that if we are planning to do street performances downtown, we may need to apply for permits from City Hall. Bridge and Cory will do some research on this and get back to us.

Walking Tour Script

The group spent a little bit of time going over the draft of the walking tour script--which at this point is a series of blurbs. All but one of the bars has been blurbed, as it were--only today has Christy been able to find any solid information about Winters (including a newspaper photo of the owner!). She will complete the Winters blurb shortly.

The walking tour script, understandably, is a bit rough and haphazard at this point. Some of the blurbs are way too long. It will need a strong editing team to turn it into a coherent tour narrative. Fortunately, we have an amazing editing team--over the next week, Collin, Adrienne, Lydia, and Christy will edit the walking tour script. We will assign sections of the tour to various editors, based on the clusters of sites Christy identifies. Having four editors on the job will ensure that the tour is more coherent, but still retains a multivocal feeling.

Collin mentioned that he had briefly made it to the Buffalo Historical Museum last week, and that he would be going back this Friday. Unfortunately, he warned us not to get our hopes up. So far, he has only been able to find one picture of the Kitty Kat. Other members of the group replied that this was okay: first, we can search for pictures from other resources. We’ve been able to find some online and some in the book, and Adrienne and Ana will be

asking author Liz Kennedy if she has any pictures in her personal collection shortly. Second: Even if we don't have pictures of every bar, we have other sources to show people, like Sanborn maps and newspaper articles. Tour guides can have these available at each site to show people, and Christy has a TON of clear plastic covers to protect them in. Third: because our tour has essentially become a series of guerrilla art performances, it is okay to ask people to use their imagination when reconstructing the past of these sites.

Performing the Walking Tour

Amanda and Ana led a discussion about their ideas for performances during the walking tour. Part of their plans involve pre-recording our blurbs about each bar and playing them for tourists, rather than having the tour guides recite them. The idea behind this decision is that it will a) erode any separation between audience and performers, b) allow tour-goers to wander around the sites as they listen, rather than being glued to a tour guide, c) give the tour an atmospheric, mysterious, and performative feel, and d) make it easier for us to eventually turn the walking tour into an app.

If we want to pre-record the tour script, we will need to do that SOON. Amanda has audio equipment for that (and Adrienne has some equipment for reducing reverb), and Nissa has sound engineering experience. We want multiple speakers to record their voices, and so far, Amanda, Bridge, Lydia, Adrienne, Nicole, Renee, and Moira have volunteered. We want to make sure that our speakers encompass a wide variety of races and ages, though, so we should keep that in mind as we recruit speakers. Finally, Ana is interested in recording the stories of people who still have memories of these bars--people like Bobbi Prebis and Renee Ruffino--and integrating those stories into the recordings.

In addition to the pre-recorded stories, of course, we want performers to interpret the stories on site, in some way. As of yet, we don't have many performers recruited. Ana and Amanda are planning to talk to Ari Matteliano, a local burlesque performer, after the meeting. But we need more people. We briefly brainstormed some ideas during the meeting: Nicole has a professor who is a performer, and was willing to talk to her about getting involved. Collin spoke to a friend in the local theatre scene about what we are doing, but said friend couldn't think of any local queer women in theatre for us to recruit. Adrienne suggested that Shawn, who performed in drag at Gena's wedding, could perhaps do a performance commemorating Jacki Jordan.

In shaping these performances, we want performers to have some leeway to interpret the history as they see fit, but we also want them to engage directly with tour-goers. We still need to decide what that looks like--including how we want to mark the sites. (Cory, for instance, suggests a "Gay bar was here" sign, in the style of a recent action by a NYC-based history project.) Finally, we need to be up front with performers that as a volunteer-run organization, we don't have much money to pay them. We are limited to a small honorarium (amount to be determined as we examine our budget), and perhaps hosting a thank-you dinner.

In any event, we need to recruit performers FAST. We need to know who we are going to recruit by next week's meeting.

Assignments for Next Meeting:

Person	Tasks
EVERYBODY!!	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Decide how many people we want to allow to participate on a single tour day. ● Come up with a list of people to recruit as speakers or performers BY NEXT WEEK.
Adrienne	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ask Christine Varnado whether/when UB wants us to perform the walking tour for their Gender Studies festivities. ● Draft press release. ● Draft email blast. ● Edit section of walking tour script. ● Remind Nissa to change addresses of bar sites, based on our most recent research.
Amanda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Meet with Ari Matteliano.
Ana	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Meet with Ari Matteliano.
Bridge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Research (with Cory) whether we need permits, and the logistics of obtaining them.
Christy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reach out to Evergreen Lofts; ask if we can use the lofts as a starting-off point for our tour. ● Create spreadsheet dividing the tour into clusters. ● Create fancy registration portal for walking tour. ● Complete Winters blurb. ● Edit section of walking tour script.
Collin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Work on performance schedule with Moira. ● Ask Marble + Rye if they would be willing to host a tour afterparty. ● Edit section of walking tour script.

Cory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin designing tour passport. • Research (with Bridge) whether we need permits, and the logistics of obtaining them.
Lydia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Edit section of walking tour script.
Moira	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work on performance schedule with Collin.
Nicole	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk to professor about performing for walking tour.

NEXT MEETING: Wednesday, Aug. 22 @ 6pm
Preservation Buffalo Niagara